

THE SECOND OFFICERS'S WIFE AND OTHER STORIES

All of the stories in this book are pure fiction without any reference to real people but the stories are realistic representations of the environment, law and attitudes of the times in which they are set.

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The Author

After a mixed career at sea during which he failed to write the novel he wanted to Robert has produced a full length novel "Anwei's Diamond, the Diamond Makers" formerly "A shard of Glass" and the shorter reads herein. He is able to draw on his experience to paint, with knowledge, unusual situations and draw sensitive and sympathetic characterisation of the people in various scenarios.

THE SECOND OFFICERS'S WIFE AND OTHER STORIES

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By Robert Ogden

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THE SECOND OFFICERS'S WIFE

PROLOGUE

Julian and I were old friends. We'd been at school and uni' together and, I guess, he was the bright one. He had landed himself a job at the BBC and his situation was what might be called a 'career path'. On the other hand I had struggled to become a print journalist and was in great danger of completely missing the boat with respect to the new electronic Internet media.

We met in a pub in Notting Hill. After the first pint and joshing around a bit he looked at me seriously. 'Have you heard of Lilly Bauman?' he asked.

'Of course, she has the most beautiful voice in England. I've got some of her CDs.'

'So you like her?'

'I could fall for her but she's a bit older and I have a wife and a kid. Eh, anachronism beats us all.' I said.

'I've got a bit of a problem and maybe an opportunity for you.'

'Shoot.'

'She's not suitable to go on 'Who Do You Think You Are'. Some people don't have enough of a story or they would be distressed after they find their ancestors were crooks or fascists or worse, or they're frightened family and friends may be upset by personal revelations.'

'So what? Where do I come in?' I asked pointedly.

'She wants a biography or autobiography done. Not to be on TV but as a book. She wants to have some control which she thinks she won't have if it's on the box. Death of her mother: unsolved mystery. We can't run it because we can't find the evidence and it could reveal a murder.'

'O.K. so you think I can do it justice; a major celeb'?'

'Well you're a bloody writer aren't you? I am offering to recommend you to her. She is lovely. She is puzzled by a lot of things which we brought to light in our research and she wants to have time with someone sensitive who can write this stuff up in the form she wants. In the end it may be a biography or an autobiography with you credited with assisting her. You will be recognised.'

I didn't bite his arm off but sat there for a moment thinking of the joy of settling debts and even taking Jane on holiday.

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‘You’re a good mate, Julian. I am up for it. Actually I’m up for anything that pays, just now. My God, Lilly Bauman and she’s actually very well known, famous and has an enormous fan following. Why didn’t she do it before?’

‘Too busy, too modest and her agent’s not really on the ball. He’s an old Welshman, not a very shrewd businessman in today’s world. You’re right; they should have done it years ago. However my guess is: now is the hour. You’ll not only get the fans to buy it but a much wider public. When you deal with Mr. Davies, her agent, make sure you get a cut of the royalty as well as a fee based on the work you do.’

I scooped the third pint and told Julian to go ahead and went home mentally spending the money.

In the next few days I called Lilly a few times and finally got through and had a very pleasant meeting. She was unsure about the need for an autobiography or a biography. What she really needed was something else incidental to the work. I said I would oblige if I could. I got in touch with her agent and then with a publisher I had in mind. The agent was very obliging with a fee and the publisher said he would give me an advance as soon as I gave him a thousand word synopsis and a sampler of about ten thousand words.

Here’s the story. I have characterised some of the players based on the written evidence to make them come to life but

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stuck as closely as possible to the facts as they appear in evidence.

Rob

THE SECOND OFFICER'S WIFE

1 WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

A large Mercedes pulled up outside Captain Ferring's bungalow, tied accommodation attached to the School of Navigation, Warsash. Julian, in designer jeans and a tropical shirt got out of the driving seat and a smartly dressed, blond woman, vaguely familiar, alighted from the passenger side. Ferring had been about to draw the curtains on the early dusk, and seeing them he had assumed they were visiting some other house and was surprised when they came up his path and rang his bell.

"Good evening, Sir," said the young man looking down at his clipboard. "Am I speaking to Captain Ferring?"

"Who wants to know?" asked Ferring coldly.

"We are working for the BBC. Look, this may be a bad moment but we came down to visit someone in Southampton by appointment but they are in hospital. As we were passing and you were on our list we thought we'd chance it. I am afraid we couldn't call you in advance because we don't have your phone number. Could you spare us a few moments of your time?"

"What's it about?" he replied always suspicious of the press and reporters. "What do you want from me?"

"For the BBC, 'Who Do You Think You Are?'" he said, getting the stress wrong so it sounded like a direct question.

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"I know who I am. Who the hell are you? What do you want?" he moved the door as if to shut it.

"Do you recognise this lady?" Julian asked before the door closed.

"Perhaps," said Ferring, "Are you an actress?" he asked looking into her eyes and recollecting something on TV.

"A singer. I've been asked to go on this show: 'Who Do You Think You Are?'. Have you heard of it? This is Julian and he's doing the research. I am supposed to be having fun going back over my relatives but I don't have much to go on. My name is Lilly Bauman; I'm quite well-known singing both classical and choral music. My name was originally Liza and Julian found out my birth name was Price. My birth mother was Welsh: Bronwyn was her first name."

"Jesus, not this again! I hoped it had all gone away." Ferring said, glaring at Julian and then turned to Lilly with a smile. "So are you Bronnie's daughter? She gave you away for adoption."

"Yes, my mother disappeared later, they say. My adoptive parents were wonderful and I was not properly aware of my adoption until I was twenty-one by which time I was into my career and was not curious."

"Come in and sit down," he said gruffly leading them into the sitting room. It was a small room for such a large and imposing man of over six foot with his straight back and somewhat military bearing. There was a well worn armchair and a

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small, cheap sofa and a dated television; definitely a bachelor residence.

Julian looked uncomfortable but he came in quietly and sat beside the beautiful fiftyish star. "Er, perhaps I should explain the circumstances," he opened, hesitating.

"It's apparently very simple in one way," said Ferring turning to Lilly, "I knew mother. We were lovers. She disappeared; but it was actually very complicated and resulted in a tragedy, ruined lives, suicide, broken marriage, imprisonment, you name it. It was a compound tragedy."

"Were you involved in the disappearance?"

"Up to my neck," Ferring said, looking angry.

"Oh Julian, why didn't you warn me?" exclaimed Lilly, obviously alarmed.

"I didn't know the story," he paused and looked across to Ferring with fear and shifted his gaze to Lilly in consternation. "Look, I was fed a list of names of variously connected people. All this happened before I was even born! I didn't see the connection between you and this Captain Ferring, but he was on the list and we've had a wasted day in Southampton and I just thought 'why not?' It's what I'm paid for."

Julian and Lilly turned toward Ferring.

"I've been working here for five years," he rejoined. "Fifteen years ago they let me out on parole. For five years I was

skipper on an effluent barge on the Thames, another five years dredging for aggregates off the coast and at sixty five they retired me. Thank God for this little job here: I teach navigation and ship stability. I may be able to stay on but this year they may kick me out from here. The college never connected me to the case, thank goodness. I gave them a story about going to Hong Kong and losing all my money on derivatives and having my records destroyed in a sinking. I think you get my point. I may be able to help you but I certainly won't be on television or allow my name to be used." He looked around the room and then at the two of them on the sofa. They looked harmless but he knew they were a real and present danger to his future.

"We'd better have a drink. I drink rum these days but I have gin and some tonic, a bottle or two of lager and some Coke which I mix with rum, although some people may think it's tea time."

Lilly asked for Coke without rum and Julian said he'd like lager if the bottles were small. When he returned the captain continued:

"I cannot explain here as we speak. Actually I loved her; well, as much as I have loved any woman, but I was moved on and she married Oliver Watkins. I was also fond of Ollie but, well, he had problems with her or rather problems of his own. It was a horrible story and has led to the deaths of two people I loved and respected, and to my incarceration. I suppose you really want to know, and you have the right to know, the fate of your mother.

“It was truly an accident. I was certainly to blame. I think the jury brought the murder verdict because they were morally appalled by the circumstances. The appeal against the murder charge succeeded for lack of provable motive, but the judge in the appeal still applied a harsh sentence for manslaughter by negligence.”

“How the hell did it happen?” demanded Lilly, “I am shocked but I am not a baby anymore and my life has been good but, do I understand that I never had the chance to know my mother because you killed her?”

“Well, not quite, but technically, yes,” said Ferring looking downcast.

Ferring waved his arm in the direction of his bedroom.

“I may be able to help you with a lot of written stuff I have about her, about me, how it happened. It was bad but not evil. I have put it to behind me in my mind but it still haunts me.....”

“As it bloody well should!” she interrupted and then burst into tears. “Why did you bring me here, Julian? Is this man who killed my mother a monster? And did he spend years in prison? Who is he to me?”

Julian looked frightened. He had precipitated this meeting without knowing what he was doing. He was a media journalist and now as a researcher for television had been enjoying his career until this moment. The research had been sloppy and he

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had hassled his colleagues to put it together too quickly. Now he even wondered if Ferring might be dangerous; a murderer.

Ferring had gone into the bedroom and returned with a brown foolscap envelope. "To start with some photos. There is more material but I will have to track it down and review it before I send it out to you.

"May I call you Lilly? I want you to promise you will not publish anything with my name mentioned until you have read the whole story and then only with my permission. Julian you are held to the same promise. I know you are a journalist but I will go after you if you break the promise and publish anything inflammatory or sensational.

"Actually, you may not have to keep your promise for many years. I am awaiting a final diagnosis for breathing problems: cancer. We'll see."

On that sad note they left.

They were both silent while Julian found his way out of Warsash toward the main road. As they approached Sarisbury Green Lilly asked:

"Could you take me to a hotel in Southampton? Look how late it is and I feel completely bushed. Just drop me off at the Novotel across the road from the station. I'll get back to London by train in the morning. I want to look at this stuff." After the drive Julian went into the hotel with Lilly's small suitcase and booked a room for her. She carried the large brown envelope.

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As she was about to get into the lift she turned and said, "Julian, why don't you stay? I hate eating alone and perhaps we can find some interesting material from what's in the envelope."

He went back to reception and took a room. They arranged to meet in the bar in half an hour.

Each refreshed themselves in a shower and came down to the bar.

As she perched on the stool beside him she smiled broadly and started off in a bright mood, "You know, I was a bit scared when I first proposed to stay in the hotel on my own: I am sorry but I did not want you to share any surprises the ghastly past might reveal. But now, with a change of heart, I know I'll feel better with you here. I don't need to hide anything. My life is good and, at least in the public eye, I have been successful and achieved a lot. In other words I am confident. Do you understand?"

"What will you drink, Miss Bauman?"

"Lilly, please. I am not Miss Bauman, as you probably know, I am actually Mrs. Liza Scott. You can forget Scott. We had two sons together but then he buggered off with a younger woman who wasn't famous and busy every evening. She couldn't sing a note but I believe she is an excellent cook. Can you imagine?" she laughed out loud. "Anyway, what about a rum and blackcurrent? I got used to it when I had trouble with the vocal cords."

Julian turned to the barman. "Could you get a rum and black for the lady?" and then back to Lilly.

"Lilly, you don't know how privileged I feel sitting with you here just the two of us quietly chatting."

"Perhaps it would help us both if I were to tell you a bit more about how I got to where I am. I only put bits of it together before the BBC arrived on my doorstep. I really had a lovely childhood. My Mum and Dad were the loveliest of people but when I was about eleven I got the first inkling that things weren't quite as they seemed. My father came home one evening very upset. He had been jostled at the bus stop. There was a partial strike, the buses were overcrowded and it was normal to have to miss two buses because they were full. The people in the queue would get a bit restless but he was upset and Suzy saw it and forced him to tell her about it. 'They said: "Walk home Jew boy, no Yids."' Then they laughed that horrible laugh we used to hear before the war.' But worse happened. He'd walked home through the streets. He passed a pub and he saw men drag a piano out of the bar. They took sledge hammers and 'they murdered that piano.' He told us they hit it with enormous vindictive maliciousness. He did not have tears for the racist insult. He was used to that, but to wreck a piano in broad daylight with such hatred. It made him so sad."

"Look at me" she said, "I am a true blond and blue-eyed, round cheeks and freckles when the sun comes out. It never occurred to me before that incident, but my mother had black hair, deep brown eyes and an aquiline, rather sad face. Although

my dad was fairer-skinned he had rich, brown, curly hair and strong, heavy features. I was not very like them.” She paused for thought. “They called him ‘Jew boy’. I agonised that perhaps I was Jewish. Why the agony? But, strange as it would seem now, there was an underlying prejudice against Jews. I found out later that the teachers and other parents who had seen me going home with my mother assumed she was the maid. She always dressed in dark, second hand clothes from habit and her frugality helped us to buy our music.”

She gave Julian a big wide smile and took a swig of her drink. “You see, Suzanna Bauman, my mother, is the reason for my success. She was devoted to music. She had been given a half size Dresden violin at an early age and had been a prodigious player. She told me a very sad story about that violin. As she waited on the platform for the *kinder transport* train, aged eight, a Gestapo officer had taken her little violin in its canvas case and smashed it into small pieces against the wall and then under his highly polished boots.

“She told me she was devastated with grief because she had loved the violin more than anything in the world, as it would be the only normal possession in her future alien life. She said that just holding the canvas and feeling the neck of the instrument below her fingers or cuddling the body was her security. That violin had been her only beloved friend as she was separated from her parents and shunted around among the thousands of other bewildered kids. She dragged the canvas bag with the broken woodchips all the way to England.”

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She took another sip of her drink and saw the sadness in Julian's eyes, perhaps a tear.

"Don't worry. After a couple of weeks of official bullying and discomfort she was fostered by a Welsh couple. Of course, she only spoke German but as soon as she was in the house she spotted a violin in the front room by the piano. She told me how she went over and stroked the polished case. These people were very musical. The husband was quite a bit older and his war effort was as a warden. The wife was engaged at the coal mine in the kitchen, feeding the hungry miners. Mama could not communicate with them when she arrived but they understood that she was curious about the violin so they opened up the case and handed it to her. It was not a miniature but a three quarter they saw her take it up tuning it by ear and then she played a couple of pretty exercises. Well they were all at one immediately and she was chattering away in a mixture of Welsh and English within a month or so."

Lilly was pleased to see that Julian was smiling again.

"So my dearest mother was tutored by Mrs. Griffith and joined the choir as accompanist, but she could never sing. She had suffered from a terrible virus as an infant in Germany and her voice was spoilt for life. She said she was happy to play but envied some of the singers' beautiful voices. She was terribly keen for me to sing and for me to continue to learn to play. I excelled at the violin, learnt to play piano and was trained as a classical singer. Suzanna and Zak were very encouraging and immensely kind. When I found out later that they were not my natural

parents I was not fazed at all. It wasn't important. They had provided for me all the love and attention any child could wish for. Of course, in addition, I was working ever so hard because I had made my first successful record when I was sixteen and had a silver or golden disc almost every year after until I took a break to have my two boys. My agent kept telling me to come back. He said if I didn't I might just become another has-been. When the boys were at boarding school I took the plunge and he managed to get me a few bookings before I did some more recording."

Suddenly she was pensive. "I never connected myself with the murder. I had no idea I was connected to this Bronwyn Price. I remember reading about captain Ferring and Bronwyn Price. The News of the World made out he was a complete monster second only to Cripps. My parents must have realised the connection but they spared me. They were the sort of people who, being aware of so much sorrow, would have protected me. Anyway, at that time, it was not normal to seek out one's birth parents if you were adopted. The authorities wouldn't help and the general thinking was that it was wrong to seek out natural parents and cause unnecessary distress." Lilly put her glass down firmly on the bar.

"Enough, Julian, we must eat. I will look at the photos in the morning. My brain functions better before eleven although I cannot play or sing a note until after midday."

Lilly said nothing more during the meal and she let Julian prattle on about TV productions and where he was going in the Organisation and who he had "worked with". She loved his

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enthusiasm and delighted in his respectful name dropping. She decided he was a good sort and developed a growing affection for him. At about half past ten she bade him good-night and went up to her room while he stayed at the bar for one more lager.

Of course, she could not resist the temptation to peep into the envelope of photographs. Some were blown up to about six inches by four inches glossy very clear black and white. There were also many smaller colour prints.

They showed the young Ferring. He was on board ships in many of them, in a variety of uniforms some white suits, some shorts with long white socks, one or two in dress uniform with bow tie and white monkey jacket or some in a black reefer jacket with brass buttons, some with beautiful girls and other officers in similar uniforms. They all had gold braid or epaulets. She reckoned his age to be around thirty. Then there were a few on beaches in brief swimming trunks. Sometimes the girls were white and the beaches were Australian. In some the girls were brown and the beaches had the look of Philippines or Malaysia. He seems to have had a good life. How did he finish up in prison? This was my mother's lover. Not my dad surely, she reminded herself.

It had been a mistake to open the envelope just before going to bed. She slept for two hours but woke around one o'clock with a head full of questions about Captain Ferring and her mother and who was her father? Ferring would have claimed

her as his daughter and been more affectionate wouldn't he? Who would her father be?

The birth certificate she had used all her life had the names of Suzanna and Isaac Bauman as her parents. She knew they were adoptive and she was not a blood relation to them. She had learnt that her birth mother had been Bronwyn Price from somewhere near Cardiff. Could she find her natural father if he was not Ferring? She doubted this. Did she need or want to know?

At breakfast Julian was solicitous. "How did you sleep?"

"Not well," she said.

"I feel a bit disloyal, I suppose. The Baumans gave me so much and their lives had been blighted by the war. Suzanna started to suffer lung problems just as we were having our children and she only saw them as babies before she died of cancer. She told me her background – just so I'd know. She and Zak did not deny their Jewishness but they never even mentioned it to me. They didn't associate with the Jewish community, except those living in the house, or go to synagogue. I suppose they saw it as a cross to bear and they passed that on to me by proxy. I did not have any religion but I marvelled at the music of Handel, Bach, Heinrich Schutz and the rest. I trained in opera though, and prospered with popular classics.

"I opened up a folder of photos last night. This Ferring was a handsome fellow and by all the pictures had a pretty good life until he was caught out. Perhaps I'll see my mother in one. Let's go and give the file some attention."

They found a small reading room which had a table and chairs.

Lilly tipped the contents of the envelope out on to the table and they started to go through it.

“Let’s go through the photos and make notes of them,” she said.

Two hours later they had looked at all the photos and catalogued them with dates where possible and the names of the people they could identify. To some people they just gave numbers so they could see how often they turned up. In the end it was a pretty good job. She found her mother, Bronnie, named on one or two and was then able to identify her on several more. She was young and pretty, and in one, next to her is Suzanna, her adoptive mum holding a tiny baby. It was small, black and white picture, probably a contact print from a Brownie camera.

“That must be me. Look how proud she looks. She just adopted her baby. I expect my dad, Zak, took the picture. I must have been six months or a year old. That must be the very day I was adopted. Look, you see the white facade of the Camden Town Hall and the steps. I wonder how Ferring got hold of this. She must have given it to him. It shows he knew her after the adoption, probably not before. I don’t think he is my dad.”

Then she came across a packet of colour prints. It was bright with the Kodak logo. The negatives were in a transparent envelope.

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“Look at these! They were obviously in love. See all these pictures of them on a yacht, on the beach, skinny dipping. These are the negatives, 35 mm. This is my mum after she had me adopted. Good God it was marvellous. But then they stop. No more! But there is a date on the packet, 12th May 1964. That must be when I was three but, of course, I’m not with them. She didn’t disappear until 1966.

“Let’s stop for coffee in the lounge. Then we’ll have to check out. I need to get home. I have an appointment this afternoon with a song writer who wants me to hear some stuff,” she said.

Julian drove her back to her house in Highgate just in time to meet her musician friend.

The following day Lilly had no engagements. She was pleased her career was slowing down. She had found the last tour tiring and she was no longer sure her fan base was large enough to support her much longer. Her agent, John Davies, had hinted at the decline as she had been having problems with her voice. She had shed tears to start with but then she began to think about being free to roam or write songs or just meet old friends.

The envelope seemed to beckon to her. She had met this Ferring, her mother’s lover. He seemed to be sad and there was a mystery to be uncovered. It seems he had been convicted for her mother’s death. Murder, manslaughter; she could not remember. They had been in love and Captain Ferring seemed to be a human being, a nice man, a man you could imagine being kind and gentle when he wasn’t a racy hedonist.

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She took out the photos which Julian and she had arranged the day before and spread them out on the large dining table. They formed a history without a key; not quite random but somehow disconnected from the main narrative.

She would have to wait for the great captain to send the rest of the stuff... the words to explain it all.

2 THE CONTENTS OF THE BRIEFCASE

Three weeks after meeting Captain Ferring there was a bang on the door and a delivery man in the brown uniform of UPS handed her a large parcel. Tearing at the cardboard wrapper she found a shabby “Remploy” *faux* leather briefcase.

There was a white envelope attached with a typed letter inside:

Dear Lilly,

It is with some trepidation that I send this to you because it invites judgment which you have hitherto been spared. Your judgment can do me no harm - the harm has already been done.

I told you I wrote a lot in prison. You may find the writing a bit confused. I wrote stuff about her in the first person as if she were addressing me; to bring her back to life. Silly, I know. I wrote a lot of it as an exercise for our creative writing class. The tutor was a big fat woman with a very powerful presence and a very determined spirit. Anyway, she made it a condition that anything we wrote would not be read by the prison

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authorities. It would remain confidential unless it were to be published. She convinced the governor that no one could be creative if they knew the screws would read it. One of the themes that ran through her sessions was "voice". She gave us exercises in changing the voice of the narrator. I was quite keen on her sessions and after a while I became the teacher's pet, almost. You'll find some unrelated exercises in writing in different voices, a vicar's, a copper's, criminal's, battered woman's, tortured soldier's and so on.

When I was in jail I had hours upon endless hours to reflect and try to understand many things about my life and how it had led to my imprisonment and I was allowed to write as much as I needed. I don't know if it is any help to you but I wrote and studied in my head all the conversations between Bronnie, your mother, and me. It forms a sort of transcript. All these things weren't said at the same time nor consecutively but I arranged Bronnie's words into a history. It was cathartic. You must realise that I was in a bad place. I was convinced, by

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the evidence in the trial, I had been responsible for this person's death; a person of whom I was very fond, in love perhaps. Our paths crossed and I felt also that I could have done more for her if I had not been so mean and selfish; if she had lived. But I had not cared what she did with or without Ollie after we parted. I had careered on with my life as if she had just breezed in and out. She was just another passing phase, a diversion. There's an expression 'ships that pass in the night'. All of this I wrote in her 'voice'.

I also wrote up my own early life. This I did in the third person, as reportage, mostly because I felt detached from my past. This was also a kind of exercise. By the time I started on this I had a little Amstrad word processor and saved my stuff on five-inch floppies. They are in the briefcase along with the other media: three and half inch floppies and CDs. And then there were the court cases. I stood apart from these also because I did not accept that it was me in the dock. It was a sort of nonduality. It was happening and I was there but I did not

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have a rôle nor any control whatsoever. I was an observer and I wrote like an observer. I got over it by distancing myself and I filled in a few gaps in the proceedings with research and fabrication. I had been prison conditioned. Everyone in jail is innocent in their own eyes. It takes a while but sooner or later after you have been in there and talked to all the other lags you begin to believe the whole system is a conspiracy against the underdog.

I suppose in most cases the accused knows either that he did the crime or didn't do it. For my case I was being told I did it but had no recollection, no motive and certainly no need or desire for the horrible outcome, but the evidence was there.

Writing up *my* life was *not* cathartic, very much the opposite. My life had been shallow, hedonistic and gross. The more I remembered and wrote the more I hated myself. From being in the outside world, self satisfied and happy and, yes, a good husband and father, striving for the benefit of my family, I began to see myself as a monster. My parents would have

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been absolutely horrified if they had known what a little shit I had been in my early days at sea. My mother, at least, was spared my final conviction and went to an early grave convinced I was innocent. My father, on the other hand, attended the court, was convinced by the evidence and tried to disown me.

You see, my life had come together for the eighteen or so years after she left it, been killed, and I was acquitted 1972. At the time I convinced myself that I was truly innocent but my life was fractured and finally rent asunder by the "new evidence" which came to light in 1983 and led to my final conviction.

I wrote Bronnie's story in her voice to try to be true to what she told me and I so much wanted to bring her back to life in those lonely weeks, months and years in prison.

You are so like her to look at. I can only apologise now. Yes, I did steal your mother from you. Who knows what she would have been like now at seventy. She was bright and joyous and I don't think I ever appreciated her to the full. She would

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still be bright and joyous now. When we were young we macho boys were always moving on. We used up girls. Actually, we also felt they were using us up. Was this the effect of the sixties? Was this the effect of the music, the drugs and booze? It truly was a sexual revolution. It was parties and fun without consequences. But if we'd stopped to think we would have known we should behave like humans, not just pleasure machines.

If I hunt it down I may have a lot of stuff to throw light on our youthful affair, the shocking outcome and the tragic end not only of Bronnie, your mother, but of my good friend Oliver whom she married.

As I said, I had a lot of time to reflect while I was in prison. I wrote over and over to try to come to terms with what I had done to her and to my own life by just one crazy error of judgment - that's not harsh enough.

The judge was right, it was absolute negligence. But all the same, if I reveal the facts to you, I want to present them my way. The press has assassinated me in

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the past and my side of the story has not been heard

I hope that, rather than condemning me out of hand, you can acknowledge that my part in your mother's demise was a terrible accident for which I have also paid a price. I hope also that we can be friends or, at least, not enemies.

Yours sincerely, *William Ferring'*

4 Cottage Row, Newtown Road, Warsash,
6th August '15

There was a great mix of media just as he had said. Manila envelopes with crowns or crow's feet, lined paper and then some browning sheet of different sizes.

She started to pull out papers from several of the envelopes just far enough to see titles or the tops of the sheaves inside. She knew about foolscap and quarto but there were also small letter paper and sheets with torn edges, reduced from larger sheets.

Some of the pages were typescript with old fashioned fonts with uneven lines and then some she recognised as dot matrix print.

Where there was no date she guessed at the order by the fonts. The man wrote a lot. Most of it was not going to be

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relevant to her, she knew, but the whole bundle began to fascinate her.

She opened one envelope containing a handwritten script. This one she took out and read to the end.

Parkhurst Prison May 1989.

Bronnie is dead and I am here. I cannot bring her back but at least I can try to remember our conversations. The shrink I am seeing for my depression says I should write stuff. He says it will help me put my fractured life back into perspective. Writing about Bronnie in this way seems to be both an indulgence and a travesty. I am taking advantage of a dead person to help me live.

Bronnie told me most of the following when we were out on the Westerly often after energetic lovemaking, sunbathing or lying in the vee berth up in the bow. This is as near to a quote of her words as I can get. Writing this brings me tears but sometimes arousal. This is what she told me:

All this coming to England happened because Uncle John would visit our house when Mum and Dad were out. He'd start acting funny. He would ask me to show him my tits. I was so silly as to go ahead. I wouldn't let him touch me. He said lots of girls are proud of their bodies and like to be photographed for magazines and he showed me one: Playboy. He said they paid a lot of money for the photos and

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then he came with a camera one day and he wanted me to pose for him. I was fifteen and didn't know what to think. Anyway one day he exposed himself and played with himself in front of me. I knew it was not right and a bit horrible but he promised me money for the photos and said he was sorry about...you know...and he couldn't help himself because I was so beautiful. I called him a silly wanker and a loser.

This uncle kept coming round but he never did it again. The next summer he entered me for the Cardiff beauty pageant. He said he could get me past all the preliminary rounds and get me straight into the contest on the basis of my photos. I wasn't all that keen because I knew some of the photos were topless. To cut a long story short all these men had seen all the photos and they put me up and I won. The prize was two hundred pounds. Councillor Morgan was the chairman of the judges. He gave me half the money right after the presentation, but he said he'd keep the rest safe so it wouldn't get stolen. It would be in the bank. My uncle stopped dropping in but months later I was summonsed into town by Morgan with various promises of special work but that was when he started to pay unwelcome attention.

That bastard Taffy Morgan, town councillor and friend of my dad's; he really laid it on me. First off he said I was just the sort of girl he could get into the movies. He

asked me if I wanted to see "Tiger Bay", you know, the film. Hailey Mills was in it and we went into town and saw it. He told me I was much better looking than Hailey Mills. He started groping me in the back row half way through. I didn't mind that too much but bloody Morgan had a room booked in a dirty little hotel by the docks. We went up there out of the rain. He said it was too late to go home by bus and he didn't offer any alternative. Of course, I was sixteen and thought I was in control. He had bought a bottle of what he called champagne, fizzy and sweet, he carried on which I didn't like much and then he said he knew about my uncle. "What about my uncle?" He went on to say that he knew my uncle, that's Dad's younger brother, was having "fun" with me. Well it was partly true but didn't amount to anything. It wasn't long before he wanted the full Monty. I said I was only sixteen. "Oh" he said "you must have lied about your age. If I tell them, you will be disqualified and have to give the prize money back. Have you still got it?" But he said everything would be all right if I was "nice" to him. I said I thought I was too young and we could wait but he told me sixteen was the age of adulthood anyway and what sort of woman would I be if I was frigid at the age when most young women were fully mature and wanted to have experiences. So it happened while I was still at school and then over and over again. Then I realised I was eating out of his hand. The problem was I was enjoying it; more than

that, I was needing it and he was playing me like a violin. It was an addiction which I realised was killing me slowly. I went back week after week like a lamb to slaughter. He was a good lover raising me to extreme levels of physical excitement, like what druggies call a rush. I would day-dream about Wednesday from the previous Friday onwards. I would get all hot in anticipation when I thought of him. It interfered with my school work. He knew how to wind up my pleasure centres like clock spring and I used to leave that scruffy hotel to take the bus back to Ponty with my nerves jangling and my body shaking. He was using rubber jonnies but sometimes he would enter me without "just for a feel around". I did not know the danger and so I got pregnant.

He was very angry as if it was my fault. He called me a careless bitch; and didn't I know anything; and why hadn't my mother told me about the pill. Shit, nobody knew about the pill where I came from. He said of course everyone knew: It was in the Daily Mirror.

So he said I had to have an abortion. "It's legal now. Girls can go into hospital and it's all over in a few hours." I was obviously right in the shit. I went to my mother. She was in a pretty bad way with the vodka. She told my dad but he flew into a rage and said he'd introduced me to these people on trust and I had broken his trust and loyalty and

all that crap panicking parents throw at their kids. So he says "Where's the money?" He's after the prize money. It's in my savings account where they put money every year from since I was a baby. Before the prize it had been sixteen pounds and ten shillings, and then it had grown to one hundred and sixteen pounds ten shillings. Morgan had promised the rest of my money for being "good" to him but he took half of the prize money as "agency" for getting me the prize.

Now I'm up the duff and he backs away. But my dad corners him and demands that he pays all the money and more to have me travel to London to get a job. Nobody wants to have anything to do with me. Mum's numbing her head with vodka and pills, scared of Dad. I'm crying and weeping so much I look a complete mess and not eating and I am skinny and my whole body and face are beginning to look old and withered.

When I got to London I went to lodgings they found me, with some friend or relation I never got to meet. London was awful to start with, in Chalk Farm near Camden Town, opposite a big cigarette factory buzzing with motors all the time. I was still not showing much so I walked up the Kentish Town Road asking for work. For some reason a nice lady took me on at Jones and Hagan, a department store. She said I could work in the pen department where they sold

Parker Pens and Osmeroid and Schaeffer. I learnt quickly about all the products and then applied my energy to selling, mostly to young men trying to improve their image or young girls wanting to impress a fiancé or boyfriend. The floor walker, Mr. Bauman, was pleased with me because I really sold, but as the baby started to show, the shop manager asked nasty question about my marital status and finally they paid me off. Money was running short but my lodgings were so horrible they were relatively cheap and I worked out that I could just survive until a couple of weeks after my baby was born.

Thank God for the NHS. I went to the City of London Maternity Hospital, Islington, and had a beautiful little girl and I called her Liza after my Gran. How was I to survive? The landlord of my horrible lodgings gave me two weeks' notice. He said the other roomers had complained about the baby and anyway he knew I wasn't married and I should have told him I was pregnant. The baby and I were destitute.

I was on the street a couple of days later when I met Mr. Bauman. He admired baby Liza and he asked me to stop for coffee. He was a nice older man; at least he seemed older though he was really only eight years my senior. He'd lived through the war in Germany. He was sorry I had been sacked and asked how things were. Well, I told him. He said he knew about being hungry and lonely. He bought me a

sandwich and some cake. When I told him I was being evicted he paused. "We've got a spare room."

So I went with him to Hampstead that evening and met his wife, Suzanna. She was very nervous but after they said a few words in a strange language, she smiled a wide beaming smile when she saw the baby. He told me I must call him Zak at home, but Mr Bauman at work: at work! "Of course you may be our lodger. We could do with a little more money, rents are so high here."

The flat consisted of adjoining rooms on the first floor of a dirty redbrick Victorian building. We and the other tenants shared the bathroom but we had a partition with a front door and three rooms in the front of the house. I was offered the small room; the other two being their bedroom and the living room with a gas ring, a Baby Belling oven and sink at the back. There was a bed and I needed to buy a cot for Liza. I was to pay them one pound a week and some more money for the gas and electricity. This was less than I had paid at Chalk Farm. They told me most of the other tenants in the house were like them – displaced people or refugees. They were survivors with broken up or murdered families. It seems they welcomed the baby. They felt safe in this shabby house and they existed in the companionship of fellow exiles. My baby was a bit of normality in their disrupted world.

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When I moved in he told me that I would not have to pay rent for three months but would have to pay double for the next three. I needed to work. What I did not know was that Zak launched a campaign, slowly implanting the idea of my return to work in the minds of the management of J.S H.

Suzanna became very involved in the care of Liza. She was in danger of smothering the little one in love. On the other hand I was breast-feeding her and was very tired and physically spent. We got on fine. Suzanna would take charge of the baby while I slept. She loved changing the nappies and she never complained about washing them in boiling water, hanging them out, washing Liza's and my clothes but apart from feeding the baby I was growing apart. I found her demands annoying and sometimes her screaming painful to my ears.

I was overjoyed when Zak told me he had secured an interview for me with my old boss. He took me back on because of my past performance as a successful salesperson. Being away at work during the day was a relief and I was happy that Suzanna was taking good care of Liza.

That job lasted me for six months during which time I lost interest in Liza. Suzanna doted on her and when my milk dried up she took to feeding her with the NHS formula and Johnson's baby food. She was so careful and diligent. I

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could not have been a better mother but I began to feel excluded. They no longer seemed to need me at all, and it became obvious that I was growing away from the family. They had each other and Liza had their full attention.

One evening after we had finished our shared meal, prepared, as usual, by Suzanna we moved on to the lounge furniture, Zak in the armchair and us two on the broken old sofa with Liza lying between us dozing. Zak liked a cigarette after supper and he lit up and then I saw him smile at Suzanna. Then he smiled at me. "Suzy is very fond of Liza. Look how calm Liza is always with Suzanna." I didn't respond immediately.

To cut a long story short we discussed adoption. I agreed and it was all over in two months. We had a brief interview with a social worker and went to the registry office at Camden Town Hall with the magnificent white marble entrance. Liza Price became Liza Bauman and I left for Southampton hoping to get a job on a ship.

They only wanted people over twenty one on ships so I finished up here in Warsash as a kitchen skivvy. And then I met you. I really fell for you. I had felt addicted to bloody Morgan for the six months but not love. He was screwing me every Wednesday. The pregnancy actually set me free but it was a hard road to that freedom.

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Wilfy, you care for me or you seem to. You take me out in the boat, teach me how to sail. We have lovely meals and picnics. Making love with you is fun as well as physically necessary; as well as a rush.

There was a change of paper to some yellowish lined quarto.

Here I have put together conversations we had on the ship on the homeward voyage mostly in our fatal lovenest, the CO2 locker:

You wouldn't believe how lonely it was after you left to go back to sea. My baby was in London and I wasn't really missing her but I felt guilty that my feelings were so numb towards her. All I could think about were the grand times you and I had together. A lot of it was the physical feeling of you close to me, smiling at me, kissing me, us climaxing together panting and puffing and tiring ourselves out. Well I found one or two of the other boys were quite fun and even if they screwed me it was OK for me but none came near to you. I asked myself why. There was no answer except that you were special and I had fallen in love with you. Gradually I got used to it. I stopped sleeping around. Too messy and the boys often got too soppy and demanding. Boys I did not really fancy.

Then came Ollie. He was so handsome, boyish yet mature, perhaps the sort of man people might call charming. But actually he seemed civilised, not like Morgan, the ape. He was not big or muscular, not a great sportsman but a great party goer and we went to parties and shows, you know, the theatre or cinema or up to London. He brought excitement back into my life. He was not demanding. Sex was not his big thing, although we stayed in hotels once or twice and cuddled up but he said he was satisfied with, you know, hand jobs and caressing. It was new to me. All the men I'd known couldn't wait to shove it in and shoot their load and a moment after they were thinking of rugby or cars except for you Wilfy. You were always good in what "Cosmo" called "post coital attention". Not just a puff on a cigarette and off to the pub; but you cared how I felt.

Ollie was very affectionate, very considerate and he had his little car. We'd buzz around all over the place, seeing things and doing things and eating in nice restaurants. I didn't care much about the sex. He told me he was a bit unconfident and needed time to get used to me. He said he didn't want to let me down. Finally he managed it and then we had some nice nights in bed but I never thought he was really relaxed and he was never in command, always wanting me to take the lead. It worked out O.K. I think I may have had enough of dominant boys and men telling me what to do and demanding I did what they wanted all

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the time so it was refreshing to be in charge of what was happening.

He proposed to me just after he passed his masters' exams, I think it was extra masters', because he stayed much longer than the other men. Well, I was very happy. He went to London to the office and heard about his promotion and the ship he was to join. He was sent on a coastal voyage on a ship called "Putra" to horrid places like Hamburg, Antwerp and Hull. He told me he would be able to take his wife on the deep sea voyage to the Far East. It was all very exciting to be going all over the world to exotic tropical places. He was so relieved when I said yes and he took me back to meet his parents. I could tell they were overjoyed but slightly puzzled. Perhaps they thought I was just a common little Welsh tart. He took a week's leave and we were married in Southampton Town Hall.

Imagine my utter surprise when I saw you. He hadn't mentioned you were on board. Senior cadet Wilfy! I almost ran away. But you behaved very well, congratulating Ollie and me and not even hinting at our past. So I stayed but, of course, complications arose.

Oh Bronnie, Bronnie if only you knew! But of course YOU were the victim.

Lilly was shaking and near to tears when she finished it. The phone rang.

It was Julian: "Where are you?" she asked.

"I am outside your door. You are not answering."

She ran to the door and apologising she offered him coffee and then said she could not possibly go anywhere with him.

"I've started on the stuff Captain Ferring gave us. But the main thing is this," and she handed him the handwritten manuscript.

He speed read it as he sipped on his coffee.

"Well this is very interesting. Yes, it explains a lot. Should make good television, the fact you were rejected by your mother, fathered by some self important town councillor who seduced your mother at a tender age and then had her dispatched to the Smoke to sink or swim. Do you think there's any more that affects you directly?"

"How do I know? It's very sad and very moving. You see the Baumans were my real parents. They formed me into what I am. What I got from the Welsh was pretty good looks and a voice. The Baumans gave me music. They gave me everything except their gaunt appearance and lugubrious outlook on life. I gave them joy in exchange for their generosity, persistence and forbearance. If I had been in Wales I would have won beauty contests like my mother and, after that, if you're not Miss World you finish up at the till in Tesco like as not. But Suzanna, my

darling mother, saw far more than that in me. I am much more than a faded beauty queen thanks to them.”

“Shall we try to find out about your grandparents and this Morgan, your natural father, who your mother hated so much?”

“Look, according to this Ferring manuscript, the Welsh side of everything is a disaster. Do we need to see if there is any saving grace; anything which shows they were not so bad. I don’t want to go over there to find the whole Price- Morgan lot was a dysfunctional mob? From the reading of this there’s a chance they’re all losers.”

“Do you want me to go through this with you?” he asked.

“Well perhaps you can help, but you have a job to do. I am not sure I want this thing on T.V. unless we find some good things in the past. You may think it’s all very exciting but it’s *my* life, *my* origin we’re looking at.”

“Look, I am working for a producer. He’s got to make a program which works. I think your story might work but only if you want it to. My original training is journalism. It’s a bit like detectives. I have to run down facts, investigate them, analyse them and then hand them over to the TV guys who build them into a show. This ‘Who Do You Think You Are’ project only works if the subject really wants it to and is willing to reveal all. My point is: Do you really want to do it?”

She looked over to him with a devastated expression.
“Julian, I am not sure. We have a contract don’t we? John said

this was a job, there's a fee, I suppose. I'm a pro but this is somehow a bit personal. My stock is singing, songs, lyrics and music. Laying bare my private life, my very essence is a bit alarming. I want to have a chance to talk to John about it. What happens if I say no? Does it give you a big problem? Is it a failure on your part?"

"No, no, not at all. I am just a researcher. If there's no story, there's no story. Some other producer will just send me out to grill some other poor celebrity or dig up some dirt on the government or whatever is the flavour of the day," he said grinning.

"Give me a day or two, after I've spoken to John and had time to think more clearly."

3. WILLIM FERRING EARLY DAYS

When the two visitors had gone 'Wilfy' ruminated on this long and chequered career.

It had all started with great promise. In the summer all he wanted to do was sailing and at the age of fifteen he saved his pocket money and with help from his father bought a wetsuit to extend his season into the winter. He was a very competitive helmsman and had progressed through Mirror dinghies, Toppers and Nationals and was a regular crew, but often single handed helmsman on a small yacht called a Westerly Nimrod owned by his uncle.

The School of Navigation at Warsash beckoned him as he got the idea that he needed to think of a career. In the last two years of school he buckled down and surprised everyone by getting six O level General Certificates and being accepted by Whalley Wakeford, the principal of the college, who saw it as his duty to interview each boy personally.

To Wilfy everything he was taught was magical and easy. The only thing he could not understand was the difficulty some of his fellow cadets had with the subject matter. Seamanship was all a doddle, he knew all the knots and could splice a rope easily and learnt to eye splice a wire in the time it took his fellows to set it up in the vice. Navigation was an immediate fascination. The intricacies of star and sun sights were simply the theoretical extension of subjects he'd discussed with his uncle who had made sure he knew how to handle a sextant. Seven figure mathematical table became his automatic method of calculation.

Cargo work was new and exciting and the descriptions of rice cargoes swelling, timber in logs or boards shifting, minerals in bulk or bags breaking ships in heavy weather, wool in bales, stinking sheepskins and Rolls Royces as top stows had his imagination racing and the calculation of stowage factors and centres of gravity were second nature. Their brief encounter with marine law was a bit of a challenge but he found the commercial geography and shipping history broadened his mind and filled him with expectation. He loved the meteorology as this was also an extension of the sea lore inculcated in him by his uncle

Near the end of the year-long course he applied to several companies avoiding tankers as he had been put off by a pal at the sailing club who had come back from a six months trip having only been ashore once in Abu Dhabi where, he said, there was nothing but desert, a few camels, unfriendly Arabs and a Missions to Seamen where the strongest drink was tea.

“The officers had spent the day at the Petroleum Club and had come back to the ship pretty happy while we cadets had not even found the tea palatable.”

Wilfy was pleased to be summoned to the Foster Timms Steamship Company, in Commercial Road, London E1. He was interviewed by a greasy clerk and then sent up to Captain Flint, the Marine Superintendent, a large, imposing man with bushy eyebrows and a big black eye patch. He only asked one question.

“What makes you want to go to sea, young Ferring?”

Wilfy was in a quandary: should he use a stock answer from his 'How to pass an interview' book? Then he realised he couldn't even remember the stock answer.

"Adventure, Sir, and I like sailing," he blurted.

"Good man. No bullshit about serving your country and the Commonwealth. Right then; work hard, study hard and play to the rules. Go to the second floor and see Mrs. Dinkins through the door marked '**FLEET PERSONNEL**' who will start the paperwork for your indentures and so on. You are making a commitment for four years we will make you into a useful officer. Your father will sign the indenture as your sponsor. You'll be assigned to a ship within a month."

His first ship was the "Mystra" and they decided he could join in Aden as his father was working in the Middle East and he wanted to visit him there before joining.

Aden, he was sure must be the hottest place on Earth. He arrived there and was billeted in the Seaman's mission: Flying Angel or just the "Mish". He found that his fellow inmates were all Displaced British Seamen or D.B.S., lead-swingers, enjoying a holiday at the expense of various companies. The Mish provided room and breakfast and they spent their daily allowance in various bars on Carlsberg and Heineken. The sailors saw a posh little toff just out of school while he saw a bunch of ruffians with strange northern accents. After a couple of days his good humour and the story of his cross country trip though Yemen gained some respect and he softened to the companionship underlying

their incessant ribbing. The continuous consumption of beer helped them find a common cause.

A seemingly endless procession of ships called in for bunkers. They would stop for a day and resume their voyages like cars pulling into a petrol station. The crews came ashore for a few hours and bought Japanese electronic goods. It was a bustling place: Akai, Sony, Hitachi, Yamaha and all the other manufacturers were making beautiful reel-to-reel tape recorders, hi-fi record players, watches, clocks, televisions, mopeds, bicycles, sewing machines and a host of domestic goods all for export and all duty free for the nationals of a myriad of different countries. In addition to this trade, was a thriving market in gold and diamonds. Sitting in the shade of a street bar's umbrella in an alcoholic confusion, Wilfy loved watching the ubiquitous goats chewing up the cardboard cartons as the haggling Yemeni traders unwrapped scandalously over priced goods eventually settling for reductions of between thirty and fifty percent hastening the sailors away with their prized "bargains".

After ten days his ship came in. He was instructed to take a certain taxi-boat out to the ship at anchor in the roads. His ten o'clock departure slipped back to 1300. When he arrived on board, dressed in his white shorts, shirt and white socks and white shoes and brand new stiff white cap, he was greeted at the head of the gangway by the senior cadet.

"Walk on the plank only, look where you're going. The fucking engineers have flooded the deck with heavy fuel. The scuppers are all blocked to stop this shit from going in the water.

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The water's already black with oil so it won't make much difference. White shoes are not very suitable more like bloody black sea boots. You're Ferring; is that right?"

Everything was filthy with oil or grease. Wilfy was looking for a place to put his hands.

"Here's a rag just use it to keep your hands clean. By the way I'm Ade. I am the senior cadet, not that it means much. Just that I've been on this and other rust buckets of the Timms fleet for three and a half years. Where's your trunk?"

Wilfy felt just about secure enough to peer over the bulwark, "Down there in the boat. How do I get it up here?"

"Don't worry I'll get a couple of lascars to bring it up. Lets' get you inside."

The smell of the alleyway struck him immediately: fried food, fuel oil and the more acrid stink of lube oil and the ubiquitous odour of curry: a combination he would get used to and not notice for the rest of his seagoing career.

He was led forward on the port side of the ship. He mentally noted the directions, not being used to large vessels.

"You'll be in here; the others won't be pleased because they were just two but now three in this four berth cabin. It's top bunk for you, my old mate. Dump your bag and come and meet the mate, Uncle Pat, we call him."

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As they made their way forward they past several open cabin doors with curtains across. Conversations could be heard inside punctuated with the hissing of beer cans being opened. In some there was music; he recognised Herb Alpert and Cliff Richards and Chief Officer Pat White was playing Thelonius Monk.

“New cadet, Sir,” said Adrian Foley as he parted the curtain and entered the room. Wilfy followed.

“Ferring, is it?” said Uncle Pat. “Good, glad you could make it. Terrible trip so far. Storm in the Med, break-down in Suez; I suppose Foley has told you all about that. Anyway welcome, he’ll show you around.

“Glad to, sir.”

Suddenly, Wilfy felt at home. This Adrian seemed like a big brother, though, in fact, he was smaller and slighter. He had curly fair hair and deep blue eyes and an easy smile.

“By the way, have you had lunch?”

“Well I had a big breakfast, actually, at the Mish. I was in the Blue Angel with a bunch of D.B.S.s”

“Oh God, a right bloody shower they were, I’ll bet. Come this way. Do you like curry? They’ll be some left even if the cook’s wiped down. Bloody good curry today: same every day, really.”

“Ade, people call me Wilfy, you know, William Ferring. Those buggers drink a lot of beer. What are they doing in Aden sitting around being kept in beer money by their companies?”

“You ask me. I am told the D.B.S.s are usually idiots who’ve failed to rejoin their ships in foreign ports. Loafers swinging the lead or else they’re facing charges. Not much of an intro’ to the British Merchant Navy. Sit down here; this is the cadets’ table. Long John will get you something.”

Wilfy smiled: “Long John?”

Ade smiled back. “Yes he’s very tall for a Goanese, skinny as a rake and walks with a stiff leg. Unusual; and he looks like a pirate— we think. See you in a few minutes. *Bon appétit.*”

So Wilfy had his first meal aboard. The tall skinny Long John brought him a set of bright nickel silver utensils with the Timms crest on each one and then ceremonially served him, first rice and then a good helping of curry from a nickel silver tureen and then presented him with a condiment dish of chillies, pickles and chutney. Wilfy noted the gold banded plate had the company’s crest carefully laid to face him on the white table cloth. The steward had given him a starched table napkin.

Adrian returned and sat down at the table. “How do you like the curry?”

“It’s really good, thank you. You eat like this every day?”

“No we have proper meals. Here read this”

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Wilfy took the menu card and read:

Consommé de bœuf,

Sole meuniere,

Bengal curry with rice and condiments,

Agneau de Bretagne avec legumes et pommes duchesse,

Plum duff,

Blancmange ou Fruits en saison.

Fromages

“Every day?”

“You can have anything or everything. But let me give you a tip: if you go back on the menu it costs you a case of beer to pour out for everyone.”

“Go back?”

“Say you decide you want soup *after* you’ve had fish – case of beer- a pound of your precious money – a few day’s wages for you.”

“It’s all in French. I can understand most of it, but why?”

“The passengers love it. The food can be really horrible sometimes. Casseroles often contain tripe masquerading as lamb or beef, in thick brown gravy, curry the same but the passengers

have to be convinced it's *haut cuisine*, you know, French. We get loads of rhubarb and stuff called broccoli. No-one eats that shit at home. It's kind of pulped to a green mush. Can't complain: There's meat and there's potatoes, as they say."

"This is called the saloon isn't it? All this panelling and inlay and the furniture and all the linen and the silverware, sure beats the Formica tables and the tubular steel chairs in the mission."

"Not bad is it?" said Adrian with a smile betraying a touch of pride.

"Right we'll go up to the bridge. I have to test the gear with the third mate at two. We're supposed to sail at three. Never happens on time, but we stick to the plan until it stops working."

They went into the foyer and Ade led Wilfy up the oak stairway to the passenger deck and then on to the captain's deck and the bridge. As they passed the captain's door a gruff voice emerged from behind the curtain:

"Hullo there," said the Captain parting the curtain, "Ah Foley, what have you got there?"

"New cadet, sir. Ferring, sir. Joined today."

Wilfy caught the fumes of strong drink as he became aware of the ruddy red-nosed face of his new commander.

"Good afternoon, sir," He said not quite sure what to do with his cap or whether to salute this important gentleman.

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“Right you are Felling, yes, welcome on board. Foley will show you the ropes. Sailing in an hour, God willing. Not always the case.” The curtain closed and they were left alone staring as if at the end of a performance.

“Oh, he’s not bad. It’s the mate who runs the ship. The ‘Old Man’ gets grumpy if the routine is broken or you make a mistake on stations but mostly it’s a matter of making him decent cocoa and running his errands. I feel sorry for the Second Officer. He has to visit him at twenty hundred with the ship’s nav’ report and gets dragged in to drink g. and t. until at least ten. Misses his dinner most nights.”

A narrower companionway led up to the wheelhouse. A lean cadaverous man hovered at the top of the stairs.

“Sparks, meet Wilfy, our new recruit.” Not smiling, the man, who really did look nearly dead, took Wilfy’s outstretched hand in his cold bony grip. Then retreated backwards and closed the door.

“He lives up here. The radio room is here, next door. He doesn’t normally go anywhere else. Nothing much normal about him. He has his meals sent up. Only the chief steward knows his name.

“This is the chart room and the wheelhouse. Gets bloody full at stations. Your job will be the Stations Book. It’s a continuous log of what happens up here. Every telegraph movement, every helm order, every change of course, buoys or other things we pass noted with the time from that clock – one

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of our jobs now is to correct that clock. The chronometers tell the time in G.M.T and we keep that one on local time. The time zone is minus three here. I'll sing out the time, you check the clock and give it a wind up for safety."

Wilfy swung open the glass front of the clock and wound it up.

"Not too tight," shouted Ade, "I broke one once. Hell of a stink. Old Man said he'd take the cost out of my wages. O.K. fourteen oh three when I tap on the table."

Wilfy set the clock and looked at the dog-eared book on the little fold down table. He reminded himself that he must use the 24 hour time for all his entries. Ade was back.

"I'll call the engine room now. This is a voice powered phone. These are all war surplus, enormous, awkward and heavy; just two wires inside. Turn this handle and it squawks at the other end. Ade did it and took hold of the heavy receiver.

"Hi, Joe, let's do the telegraph." He pointed to the pedestal with a polished brass head with a round glass window with the legends **STOP, DEAD SLOW, SLOW, HALF** and **FULL** in segments and a big handle on top.

He turned to Wilfy. "Grab that handle and swing it to full astern."

There was a mechanical ratcheting as he moved the lever through three quarters of a turn back into the red sector. Then

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with ding-a-ling the needle behind the glass followed. "Right, now one step at a time turn it to full ahead."

A skinny Indian appeared at the wheel house door. "Atcha, sahib," he said.

"Ah, sukkani. New man here. Number four cadet," said Ade.

"Borth atcha, welcoming, chota sahib," he said with a namaste.

"The sukkani is the helmsman. No autopilot yet, supposed to be coming soon, perhaps never. This man will steer a perfect course and see a ship before anything is above the horizon – before you or I can see it with binoculars. No need for radar while we have these jonnies."

"Right we'll call the engine room to get the steering pump running and test the steering. I say, why don't you do that, Wilfy? Blow on that voice tube marked **ENGINE ROOM** and ask Joe to get the steering pump going. We'll go down there afterwards so you can see the set up."

Wilfy took the unfamiliar brass bell-shaped mouth piece and blew into it. It seemed a bit spongy so he blew a second time. He put his ear to it and heard a voice say "engine room".

"Joe?"

"Junior here."

“Start the steering pump, please,” he spluttered.

“Who the fuck’s that?”

“New cadet, Ferring.”

“Right you are, new cadet Ferring,” came the amiable reply.

“You have to give him five minutes to get down to the steering flat. He’ll call back on the squawker when he’s there.”

This was all quite puzzling and exciting to Wilfy. Next Ade showed him the stations book. “Always write with indelible pencil. Can’t rub out mistakes. Just cross through. Make sure your pencil is sharp. Here, put the date at the top of the page and hope we get away before midnight. Times down the left hand side events in the middle.”

The sound powered telephone squawked. Abe picked it up. “Right.” he said “half an hour it is” and he turned to Wilfy. “Not enough steam pressure, wankers! I told them an hour ago.”

Another young man in uniform appeared in the wheel house. “Ho, Foley, everything tickety boo? Yes sir. This is Ferring, Wilfy, new cadet, joined here in Aden. Engineers haven’t lit the donkey boiler yet. No steering gear; ready in half an hour.” Reported Ade. He turned to Wilfy and said: “Third Officer, twelve to four watch. I’m actually on the four to eight with the second. Just helping out today as Brown is still ashore. Just up to the monkey island next.

“We’ll take the covers off the compasses and check them. There’s the standard compass up there and a gyro repeater.”

They went up the vertical ladder on to the roof of the wheelhouse. “This binnacle is for the standard magnetic compass with a periscope for the helmsman to see it. Light bulb inside; this old man likes us to keep the light on day and night to keep the binnacle dry.

“This is the gyro repeater for taking bearings. You have to shin up the ladder and use this azimuth ring to sight an object. Modern ships have repeaters on the bridge wings – never mind, good exercise.

“You’d better meet the others. We have to call them to be ready for stations but they may have been ashore. Let’s go down over the deck.”

To Wilfy it was becoming a bit overwhelming.

“This is the boat deck,” he said after they had descended two companionways. Wilfy noted the clean bleached teak deck with black caulking and the nicely painted taffrails with the same rounded bleached teak caprails.

“These are the lifeboats. Make sure you know which one you’re assigned to. Open wooden boats, oars and sails, and these radial davits which take half an hour to deploy. Better believe we’re unsinkable.”

They reached the stairway to the main deck. The black oil was being swabbed up by a motley gang of men, some in boiler

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suits, some in blue shorts and shirts. The handrails on this stairway were simple pipe rails now wiped clean. They entered the accommodation by the port side and went forward to the cadets' cabin.

"Fred, this is Wilfy." Fred was just in his underpants and he was decidedly bleary-eyed. He looked Wilfy up and down.

"How do, mate, that must be your fucking trunk in the study. Welcome aboard. When are we going, Ade?"

"Soon as we can. Pilot's for fifteen hundred. We're testing gear now and just waiting for the wankers to fire up the donkey boiler."

"Ferrgh," expleted Fred and stepped toward his bunk ready to lie down again.

"Where's Tom?"

"Still ashore getting an Akai, silly bugger, as we don't have an inverter to drive it but he says he'll get one in Hong Kong. Got no music anyway: get that in Taiwan, you know, pirated. Wilfy, your bunk is up there. Shift that suitcase to the other top bunk. Put your stuff in one of the empty wardrobes," he said as he lay down again.

Then Ade indicated they should leave. "You'll have to give the chief steward your documents and he'll sign you on to the articles. The mess boy will make up your bunk. We'll go down to the steering flat now."

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The deck was almost clean and the buckets of recovered oil were being poured down the bunkers' vent pipes. The lascars' sea boots were being cleaned with Teepol as they were joking and chatting in Hindi.

To get to the steering flat they had to pass the crew galley with its overpowering stench of deep fried garlic and curry, down through the crew accommodation and a watertight door and down a steel stairway. The place was very hot. An engineer in a once-white boiler suit was fiddling with a motor and an oil can.

"It's going now steam's up. You must be new cadet Ferring. I'm Joe what's your other name?"

"He's Wilfy," said Ade.

"I'm about to call the bridge. I suppose that dosey third mate is up there."

He cranked the phone and reported the steering gear ready. The little motor started making a noise like a car engine and the great tiller on the head of the rudder stock started to move, pushed by a large hydraulic ram.

"That little engine, driven by steam, pumps hydraulic fluid into the ram," shouted Ade above the noise. "Get it?"

Wilfy nodded and looked around. The whole place was new and unfamiliar, the noise was ear-splitting, but the mechanism was simple just like the diagram in the seamanship text book. Ade indicated to go up and out.

As they passed along the alleyway Ade pointed out, "Six to a cabin, one small messroom, eating and washing up on the main deck. We have to go round with the captain every Sunday to do an inspection when it's all very clean and Bristol fashion."

So it was that Wilfy got his introduction to his life to come.

He was on 'Mystra' for the first eighteen months of his apprenticeship on two voyages back and forth from Hong Kong, Kaohsiung, Malaysia, Japan and a round-the-world trip on the MANZ route broadly a west-about, semi tramping voyage taking in Halifax in Canada, New York, Newport News, Panama, San Francisco, the Pacific Islands of Hawaii, Wellington in New Zealand, Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide in Australia, Colombo in Ceylon, Cape Town and Accra.

In his own opinion it was the making of the man from the boy. After the sordid fleshpots of the Far East it was great to meet real girls, who were very impressed by his clean good looks and uniform and by his nice manners. By the time he arrived in Cape Town for two day fuelling stop it had all gone to his head and as God's gift to women he was immediately entertained by a powerful blond called Karla who he met at the Flying Angel Mission and who managed to exhaust him in his two nights ashore. He was pleased when the ship let go for the trip northward. At anchor in Accra there was no shore-leave. The vessel was anchored a mile and a half offshore and the cargo was all carried out to the ship in surfboats crewed by eight or ten muscular black tribesmen. Ten huge teak logs, about twenty feet long and six feet in diameter were floated out alongside the ship

and parbuckled on board; last thing loaded on the side decks. There was no rest for the officers or the cadets and anyway it was thought dangerous for young boys to go in to town.

Loaded 'down to the marks' the 'Mystra' arrived in London in the spring of 1965 and Wilfy was sent down to Warsash, near Southampton, for the so-called Mid Apprenticeship Release course. This was a very enlightened idea designed to keep the young chaps keen and give them a fair taste of the education on offer to the rest of the British youth enjoying the enormous expansion of University and Polytechnic places.

Wilfy was near his home and near his familiar sailing grounds. He was almost in heaven but his recent voyages had given him an appetite for affairs of the heart and animal lust. It wasn't long before he hitched up with a so called 'kitchen wench', Bronnie. She was exceptionally pretty with blonde hair and bright glassy blue eyes and a musical Welsh accent which differentiated her from the other girls who spoke with the local Solent vowels.

She was a needful and an enthusiastic lover and he fell head over heels for her. The summer was coming on fast and he took her sailing and on his uncle's Westerly yacht they made passages to anchorages and harbours in the Solent and the Isle of Wight, making the best possible use of the wide double berth in the main cabin below. For Bronnie it was the best time ever with a boy who she felt cared, enjoying her company and making love often and long.

She also loved to be taught the basics of sailing and simple navigation as they explored secluded anchorages around the

Island. As the light began to fail they might go ashore in the little inflatable to pubs frequented by the yachting crowd.

As all good things do, it came to an end when Wilfy was called away to sea on the day after the end of the second term. They wrote a couple of times each but found they had little to write about so the correspondence waned. Wilfy had been assigned to a passenger ship out of Southampton to Australia making a double header from Sydney, where he picked up his old acquaintance with Brenda who enthused about how much she preferred English men to the Australian variety. He realised that opening doors for a girl or pulling out her chair was sure to impress, although he might not be able to compete in blond muscularity with the surfers of Bondi Beach.

The first cruise of the double was to New Zealand and the second was much more interesting to Japan for the Cherry blossom. Brenda was waiting on the quay after each short trip. She was a real athlete and Wilfy found her perfect body to be superbly stimulating. She was very demanding and sex became somewhat competitive. It seemed the trip was all over far too soon when he sailed away back home. From the arrival at Southampton they did a very quick turnaround and went on a Mediterranean Cruise. On their return, leaving Bronnie to her own devices, Wilfy took a month's leave with a mixed bunch of male friends in the Cairngorms to get as far away as possible from the sea and into beautiful scenery and greenery. It was a kind of all male outward bound trip, camping, hiking and drinking local ale.

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When he arrived back at his parents' house in Hampshire, he tried to call Bronnie at her digs and got no reply. He thought nothing of it. Water had passed under the bridge.

Then he reported back to London and was summoned to the Personnel Officer for his next assignment.

4. CAPTAIN RORY GORDON

It was a very fine day in the Indian Ocean. The vessel was rolling gently and a light smoke was rising from the funnel. The master had risen from his armchair where he had been snoozing off his lunch and several large whiskies to make his afternoon perambulations around the accommodation block on the deck reserved for the passengers and himself. Two things affected his choice of timing. The first was his knowledge that the passengers would not be roused from their post prandial slumber until 1600 and the second was that the Second Officer's wife would appear at around 1500 to sunbathe on number three hatch.

For a man of sixty, whose relationship with women had been stunted by forty five years at sea, it was natural that he would gain a vicarious pleasure from the sight of this slender young woman wearing a very revealing bikini. He had meant to admonish the Second Officer, from the first day he saw her there, to restrain his spouse and have her wear a more modest costume but as the days went by his resolve was tempered by the diversion he derived from the view. He was not a natural peeping tom and he would have glowed red with embarrassment if anyone had called him out on his daily voyeurism.

So it was with this captain of the good ship "m.s.Putra". His nerves had stopped jangling after the sweltering Red Sea passage and the disaster of Aden where he had just managed to avoid a major fine for dropping heavy oil in the harbour. He had been obliged to confront the surly Chief Engineer, a mouthy Scouser

with a reason and excuse for everything. Fortunately the agent had greased the relevant palms with alacrity; a job he did on a daily basis. The main deck had been awash with the black stuff and Captain Gordon had been obliged to forego his trip into town to meet his good friend Captain Hemhurst of the “m.s.Pankah” voyaging in the opposite direction on the homeward leg.

He would be brought his tea at four o'clock and would have his first dram to enrich the flavour of the best Darjeeling brought by the steward on a tray with homemade biscuits and a jam sandwich. He would then confine himself to his suite while the passengers would wander around his elevated deck and the boat deck below.

Sometimes he would wonder how he had ever got himself into this benign prison. Life was pleasant enough and he was not a gregarious man. He stood on his rank and supposed that fraternising too much with the other officers would undermine his authority. His aloofness engendered a certain fear in the cadets, contempt in the Third and Fourth Officers and sympathy in the Second Officer and a mild disdain from the Chief Officer who was similarly under employed and alcoholic.

Essentially the officers were all sahibs; post colonial colonials. They had all the arrogance of their forebears but, thank goodness, none of the power. They wore the correct uniform of the day. In the Indian Ocean it was the white shoes and long white socks, white, starched shorts and shirts with the epaulets of rank on their shoulders. They referred to each other by rank

rather than by name when in company and deferred religiously to the hierarchical system.

Of course to the captain, the master, of the ship this was subliminal and *de rigueur*. No one would be allowed to slack. He would send messages down to the Chief Officer if he saw a cadet with white socks at his ankles and his worst hate was engineers in uniform with three shirt buttons open or wearing black shoes with their whites. Notes from him were ignored in good humour by the Second Engineer.

As his fantasies about the young woman ameliorated and he had finished tea and “dram” he ruminated on how he had started out on this solitary life. His first experience of seafaring was during the great depression. It was to escape the awful poverty of Glasgow and then London that he had made his way down to the Gravesend marshes to join his first ship, replacing the ship’s boy who had been washed overboard while trying to secure a loose grab bucket in a storm in the estuary. It was a collier running from Newcastle around the coast to various ports sometimes as far as Falmouth. He had learnt all his practical seamanship on the deck of the two thousand ton, triple expansion engined, “s.s. Fair Flower”. His good basic education and savings from three years on this horrible trade allowed him to study for his First Mates’ Certificate (home trade). It was only a matter of time before he obtained his masters’ and his command of a similar vessel plying the same routes.

It was the Second World War which had catapulted his career and nearly killed him at the same time. A twenty one day

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spell at the North Shields Nautical School allowed him to convert his Home Trade Certificate to Ocean Going. He was immediately recruited to take charge of a ten thousand ton general cargo Liberty ship plying the North Atlantic.

He did not hanker for the old days. The wartime ships were slow and under attack. The accommodation was crude: not that it mattered as they had no time for recreation. The ships were always undermanned, the weather was usually awful and the pressure to maintain station in convoys unrelenting. He had been sunk twice, the second time from a tanker surviving by a miracle before being posted to India where he ran a regular service between Chittagong, Calcutta, Madras, Ceylon, Bombay, Karachi and Suez master of a passenger and cargo ship overloaded with troops and *materiel*, or medical evacuees and salvaged metal and timber.

When the war was over he joined the ranks of the unemployed officers reporting regularly to Dock Street, London E1 to sign in for potential work. As the rebuilding and repair of merchant ships progressed in the next few years many of his fellows were engaged again. He had to wait until in 1948 when his name was called and he was taken on as Second Officer with the Foster Timms Steamship Company on one of their new motor ships. Around nine thousand tons she had a Doxford diesel engine and a top speed of fourteen knots on trials. Several of the eight ships of this type were to be where he worked for the next fifteen years plodding back and forth from London and European ports to India, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaya, Hong

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Kong and Japan rising through the ranks quickly as the supply of ships outstripped the number of experienced officers available.

5. BRONNIE'S FATAL VOYAGE (July 67)

Now senior cadet, Wilfy was staring backwards over the bridge wing towards number 3 hatch. The Second Officer, Oliver Watkins was busy in the chartroom working up the star sights for the ship's evening position. Oliver was conscientious and serious when doing the navigation calculations in contrast to his usual jocular attitude. The cadets loved him as he had a giggly sense of humour and easily forgave their errors and mistakes. He would invite them to pour-outs and allow them gin and tonic not normally allowed to cadets. The object of Wilfy's gaze was his mentor's wife. A handsome lusty lad of twenty, his imagination ran wild whenever he neglected his duty as lookout to reverse the direction of his gaze. There was also history.

She provoked fantasy, either in ignorance of what she was doing or on purpose to gain some advantage in the all-male shipboard environment. It was in the era of the bikini, microkini and the backless and almost frontless swimsuit; the middle sixties. Bronnie, having been obliged to spend the siesta period with her husband Ollie, would repair to the hatch-top with her brightly coloured beach towel at four o'clock when he took over the watch accompanied by his easily distracted senior cadet.

The *sukkani* would keep a good lookout reporting anything he saw to the cadet who would pass it on to the second officer. In the middle of the Indian Ocean between Durban and the Malacca Strait the chance of their cargo ship sighting another vessel or anything interesting more than once a day would be

unusual. The chain of command allowed the cadet free to indulge his lusty fantasies at the same time appear to be alert.

Their vessel was a general cargo ship, "Putra", of about fourteen thousand registered tons, one of seven similar ships of the Foster Timms line of London. She was built in 1947 when Britain was furiously trying to replace her losses of the Second World War. She was one hundred percent British of riveted construction built to the so called Isherwood pattern of five cargo hatches, accommodation amidships including six luxurious passenger cabins under the bridge, powered by a six cylinder Doxford engine situated behind hold number three. The master of the vessel, a lonely, dour, alcoholic Scotsman, Captain Gordon, had survived two sinkings of his commands in the North Atlantic and now commanded the "Putra's" crew of some fifty five men.

On the second day out of Durban as the tropical heat of the Indian Ocean began to relax the deck officers, Wilfy was caught unawares as Bronnie stood up elegantly and looking directly at him smiled broadly and waved as she swirled her towel around her, walking forward to the accommodation door. He blushed profusely but was relieved to know she had not been able to see his discomfort as she negotiated the high sill of the doorway.

Turning his mind to other things he entered the wheelhouse and popped his head round the chartroom door "Just going to take an azimuth, sir," he told the officer of the watch. This had to be done every four hour watch to check the gyro compass and shortly before sunset was the best time.

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“Just before you do, Ferring... I seem to have brought up an empty pack of cigs. Could you, please, go down to the cabin and you'll find a carton on the right hand side of my desk.”

“Yes, sir.” Wilfy's pulse raced as he realized what he was about to encounter. His heart was not wrong. When he arrived and knocked respectfully on the curtained door frame there was no answer so he peeped into the room and seeing no-one entered and made for the desk. The sound of a door closing behind him made him turn.

“Oh, it's you. What do...” she paused, “what a nice surprise. I was thinking about you.” She was holding the towel against her chest and had obviously not finished drying herself. Her hand moved and he glimpsed the areola of her left breast.

“Cigarettes,” he blurted. “Ollie, I mean the Second Officer needs a new packet... On the desk.”

“Interesting,” she mused, “you here and Ollie up there,” she smiled broadly and let the towel slip so he could see the whole of her shapely chest. She did not block his exit but he had to pass her on the way out.

“I didn't mean to disturb you.” He spluttered as he approached the door.

“Perhaps we could....no, no. He needs his smokes. Wilfy aren't you interested in me anymore?”

“Shit, Bronnie, you’re married to Ollie. I left you and we never really kept in touch. Ollie’s great. Don’t cause trouble. That would be a real bitch.”

“OK, bye bye, Wilfy. Go now.”

He returned to the bridge and the second mate offered him a cigarette from the pack. They went out on the bridge wing, dismissing the *sukkani* to get a cup of *char*, and they smoked companionably, conforming to the rule of ‘no smoking in the wheel house’. Wilfy tried not to betray his excitement so he asked a distracting question: “What do you think about this rumour of electronic navigation by satellite?”

“I guess it may happen for us one day. I’ve read some articles about it. The U.S. Navy and probably the Russians are using it now in conjunction with inertia navigation to position their submarines but it is slow and laborious. I don’t suppose we’ll have it for a long time yet.”

When the cigarettes were smoked Wilfy climbed on to the roof of the wheelhouse, the “monkey island”, to sight the sun for an azimuth check on the gyro compass and the magnetic standard compass.

Their next task was to take a series of star sights as the sun dipped below the horizon and dusk allowed the second mate to see both the stars and the horizon to measure their altitude with the sextant. The cadet marked the time of each sighting using the chronometer. Wilfy lost concentration several times as his

memory could not rid itself of the encounter with his mentor's wife.

He had to guess some of the times several seconds after Ollie had called "mark". Two of the position lines were two miles away but the rest were acceptable. Wilfy knew that the ship's position was fudged. Ollie said nothing but he was obviously not happy. It was the age old problem; the officer had to rely on a cadet to get a good time and cadets were regularly unreliable. Fudging the evening position was not satisfying for the second officer who prided himself on his competence as a good navigator, but necessary and not at all dangerous as the ship could be steered accurately for days across a flat ocean with little or no cross current to worry about.

The following morning, as usual, at around six o'clock Wilfy left the bridge to do his "rounds". This was his favourite part of the watch. First he went to the main deck and walked forward to the foc'sle right in the bow. He checked the paint locker, and up on to the deck above to make sure all the anchoring equipment was properly secure. Here he loved to stop for a while. He could hear the gently hissing and splashing of the bow wave, a muted vibration of the engine and the slow rolling motion of the deck. The 'eyes' of the ship, so called because of the two hawseholes of former wooden vessels, is somewhat romantic but on an Indian ocean night steadily making way towards the Orient, 'eyes' is apposite.

Returning down the port side of the deck he had to pass the second and third officer's staterooms. The light was on in the

second's cabin and he glanced in. She was there at the window which was open pulled part way down. She wore Ollie's Hongkong brocade dressing gown slightly open to reveal the top of a pink negligee across her undulating chest. She spoke in a stage whisper. "Come round."

As soon as he was in the doorway she embraced him and kissed him with enormous energy. A kiss as powerful as he had ever experienced with her before. The brocade had opened up completely and through his white tropical shirt he could feel the warmth of her body. His pleasure was tinged with reluctance. He took in a breath of her clean shampoo scent and pulled away.

"I must...."

"Why did you come down then?" she demanded with a pout before he could finish his sentence.

"My job."

"We have a lot to remember, Wilfy."

"What about Oliver?" he said the name for the first time. Oliver his future cuckold; or should it be *her* cuckold?

He pushed her away and stood up to his full six foot putting his face out of her reach. He turned with a military click of the heels and walked away down the alleyway. His next stop was the crew galley to check that the cook was up and frying his great pans of garlic and vegetable. He walked past the cramped hell's kitchen and leant over the stern for a few minutes to contemplate

the bubbling wake, cursing the stickiness of the ghee condensed on the blackened steel rail.

Next he marched forward to the midships galley where the Goanese night cook would have bacon and egg sandwiches ready for him and Ollie. He didn't have much time until the morning star sights so he briefly said, "Good morning, Lawrence, thanks for the sarnies," before leaping up the stairway two at a time to the bridge, with their pre-breakfast snack.

She was beginning to dominate his thoughts constantly, but he made a tremendous effort to make a good job of assisting Oliver with the morning sights.

They met again on the deck near the hatch where she was in the habit of sunbathing. It was around 1130 and she was dressed in a bright summer dress and blue plimsols with white socks. Her blond wavy hair was blowing freely in the breeze as she leant on the scrubbed teak rail near the hatch of number three hold. Wilfy had been dozing in the small slot of a study set aside for the cadets to prepare for their second mates' exams. It was his usual routine to do some reading or test questions until his eyes closed and he put his books away and went out into the sunshine to fend off fatigue. He sauntered over to her side. She turned and smiled widely.

"Hello handsome," she joked.

"Hi," he said rather flatly.

"I've been thinking. We must find a place."

“What do you mean a place?” he asked rather sternly.

“You know, somewhere we can be together, private. You share your room with Jones and I don’t think you should be seen coming and going from Oliver’s cabin, so how are we to get together?”

“What about Ollie?” he repeated.

“He’s completely lost interest. I can’t even get him excited for a moment. He was never great in bed but at least he made some sort of effort. Now he just turns over and snores when we go to bed. I don’t think the gin helps; just knocks him out. I am beginning to think he’s one of those, you know..... homos.”

It was with a mix of triumph and alarm that Wilfy realized he had been right. Ollie was failing in the nuptial department and here she was asking for him to be a knight in shining armour or *amour*. How could he betray his friend and mentor with this girl he’d known so intimately but had dismissed in the last two years?

She continued wistfully: “You were my favourite; the nicest of the bunch at Warsash but I thought Ollie was even nicer. He was such fun, always laughing, always respectful and I can see it now; he built me up. He made me feel so good, no longer a little Welsh skivvy. He made me laugh and I fell in love, more in love than with the others. The others were all fun and you especially but like the rest you had to go back to sea and leave me there. He took me home to his parents’ and they seemed to like me because of my Welsh way of speaking. They thought I was cute, and I was always on my best behaviour. We only slept together a few times

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before we got married. He said he enjoyed it but he held back. He was very nervous. He didn't make any demands; in fact I had to lead him on. I thought it was just nerves as he loved me so much. I didn't tell him about the others. I don't know whether he knew what sort of girl I had been and I wanted to change all that I really, really wanted a steady man and he was so kind and funny and considerate.

“He had an MG Midget, not a very good one. It rattled a lot and the roof leaked in the rain but it was fun in the sunshine with the roof rolled down.

“Well, he wanted me to be with him on this first voyage when his seniority allowed him to take his wife, so we married. It was so exciting and I was beginning to think my life was really coming to something. But, Wilfy, I really think he isn't up to it, you know, on the physical side, and seeing you here has reminded me of those weekends when we didn't seem to stop, you know, except to steer the boat around the Isle of Wight. I have never come like that again and again since then. If I'm shocking you, I can't help it because it's true. I suppose the truth is I *am* just a little slut but you made me feel like a real woman, not on a pedestal like with Ollie but just like a real woman with a real man.”

Wilfy had been listening to every word. Surprise, excitement and reluctance were rolled into one confusing emotion.

“Right,” he said remembering what he had seen in the CO2 room. He had spied in there a piece of foam rubber like a

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mattress without a cover. "I have a present for you, something to lie on when you sunbathe."

"That's nice. The hatch cover is a bit hard with just a towel on the canvas." But she had guessed there was a bit more to his offer and grinned conspiratorially.

"You see this steel door," he said as he opened a door next to the entrance to the passenger deck, "It's marked CO2 and there is a rubber mattress in here. It is important you start to use it every day," he said as he handed it to her. "When you sunbathe spread your beach towel on it, you know. Make yourself comfortable. Put it back in this locker. It's quite clean in here and there is plenty of space." Wilfy explained CO2 is used as a fire extinguishant on ships and industrial spaces. Being inert, it kills fires by excluding the oxygen, asphyxiating the fire. "There is space for more than twice as many cylinders for the cargo holds. Only the ones for the engine room were installed so there's plenty of space. See the release valves and pipes leading to the various parts of the engine room. They're remotely operated so no one ever comes here."

"You mean that will be our "place"?"

"We'll see." he said. "At twenty hundred Oliver reports to the captain who hauls him in for drinks. I'll be here at this locker, say, soon after eight. If anyone catches you say you think you lost your bracelet when you put the mattress away. Get it?"

This squalid little arrangement worked on most days and at night when she would sneak up to meet him on his "rounds",

until they approached the Channel on their way back to London on a September day in 1965. Of course, to them, it was not squalid but an exciting tryst as their lovemaking nearly returned to the adventurous coupling they had developed on the *Westerly*. Their meetings became regular like clockwork. Oliver was oblivious to what was going on and the relationship between the Second Officer and the cadet continued in the manner of good shipmates; mentor and mentee. Wilfy began to feel that Oliver must have guessed and, perhaps, had determined to keep his head deep in the proverbial sand. During the latter part of the voyage he was sometimes almost affectionate, but at other times moody and tetchy but he always showed the nicest of manners, professionally, and took trouble to ensure he instructed Wilfy in navigation and small points of seamanship.

Wilfy truly liked this man. He enjoyed his infectious laughter and his sympathy. On the wing of the bridge under the brilliant starry sky, when they smoked a couple of cigarettes together Ollie would talk about art and books he had read with an endearing sensitivity that Wilfy had not come across with other officers. He spoke of his mum and his brother and his sister's horse, bringing it all alive. He loved his MG in spite of its faults and frequent breakdowns. Of all his favourite things he did not mention Bronnie.

Wilfy was beginning to understand why Bronnie had been attracted to him and become very fond of him and even why she had fallen in love with him. For the first time in his life he appreciated that relationships could get complex, not just simply a matter of 'will you or won't you'. Was he getting too fond of

this man he was cheating? He felt the need to rationalise. He had no sense of guilt, in fact he saw himself as saving Bronnie's sanity *and* doing Ollie a favour. Wilfy was typical of his age; deep down he thought he was, if not God's gift, at least a manly gift to any woman with needs.

'Putra' had made her way through the Suez Canal and across the Mediterranean. They stopped for a day at Naples and the Chief Officer arranged with the Agent for the cadets to go on an educational visit to Pompeii. Wilfy suggested to Bronnie that she tag along. They all piled into a minibus with a tour guide and a packed lunch.

They had a fantastic day out and marvelled at all the extraordinary discoveries. Of course, Wilfy and Bronnie stuck together and managed not to hold hands or make their attachment too obvious to the junior cadets.

"Thank God we got off that bloody ship." Bronnie said in a quiet moment over their sandwiches. "living in that little box with Ollie is making me mad with claustrophobia. You are the only good thing about this whole miserable trip. But let's enjoy the day! By the way no more trysts this week Ollie has found some new life and wants to make love to me every time he comes off watch. I think he may be suspicious and wants to make amends."

As usual it was cold and foggy in the English Channel and their little escapes to the CO2 locker stopped. Bridge watches were much more of a job of work with coastal navigation and long hours deciphering smudgy echoes on the primitive radar.

Night time rounds were dispensed with and anyway the idea of the uncomfortable locker was not appealing.

Arrival in London was chaos. Bronnie had decided that she would not go with Ollie to his parents' house in Hampshire. His ardour had been short-lived and she would go to her mother in Wales. Wilfy made a plan to meet her in Town where he would take her to a Soho restaurant and on to a show and then on to a hotel. This cheered her up from the sense of failure and hopelessness about her marriage.

At the berth in the King George the Fifth Dock there was an urgent message for him to go directly to the office. "A taxi will be at the dock at 1430 to take you to the office and then directly to the airport to fly to Japan to join a newly built ship." He had heard on the grapevine that one of three new ships had been finished a month early and was to sail in five days for a cargo in Hong Kong. "Your luggage will be air-freighted for you. Take an overnight bag. You will be provided with safety clothing by the yard in Yokohama. The Second Officer, Ollie, had received a posting to a ship in Liverpool but was to be free for a few weeks. All their immediate intentions had been blown away. Wilfy was to share the taxi with the Captain to go to the office.

He met Bronnie in the foyer outside the second mate's cabin. He told her about the command to go to the office.

"Oh, I'm going up on deck. Too much happening here." She winked as she said it. "Ollie's met a friend and is going to London with him. I'll probably go to Cardiff tomorrow after our night out."

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He followed her up the companionway and they stood looking at each other on the open deck.

“He’s got his friend down there: Adrian? I’m sure he’s, you know, a fairy. He’s very young looking. I’ve not heard Ollie talk so much the whole trip. He can’t stop smiling and joking. Anyway they’re going off soon and planning a great night out. He’s written his handover notes and the Third Officer is being promoted to his job which makes it even simpler. I don’t suppose I’ll see him again. Good riddance, I say.”

Wilfy was full of emotion. “Look, our plans are all awry. I have to go in a taxi at half past two, straight to the office with the captain; possibly off to Japan tonight.”

Her face crinkled just a smidgen, “Come,” she said grabbing his hand, “We’ll make love one more time. We may never see each other again. We’ll keep in touch and you can come and find me some day, but who knows when?”

So they had entered that fatal room with the soft mattress. A ship’s passenger bath towel had found it way there halfway through the homeward voyage.

Their clothes were off and they were in each other’s arms and in a trice. The towel was clean and the place was warmed by the heat of the engine room.

The space was lit by a single light bulb high in the deck head. They had never bothered to switch it on or off as they were

in a very private place where no-one would bother them and the weak illumination had become part of the atmosphere.

They were fully occupied with their loving when the bulb went out leaving them in complete and absolute darkness at the same time the ship went silent. At first it had no effect on the business in hand but as they became more aware of the world beyond their physical sensations they began to be concerned.

“What do we do now?” she whispered.

“Don’t worry,” he said, “I’ll find the switch. He pulled on his pants and trousers, fastened his shirt, slipped his feet into his casual shoes and felt along the bulkhead. “Got it.” he said, as he twisted it but there was no effect. The light was dead.

“Oh my God; I can’t get dressed in this darkness. I can’t see a thing. My clothes are all over the place.”

The door was sealed and gas tight so not one lumen of daylight could enter.

“It’s OK.” Wilfy said reassuringly. “I can get a torch. Stay here.” He ordered unnecessarily.

He opened the door glancing back to where she stood holding the towel to hide her nudity. As he stepped out his heart dropped to his feet. Approaching were the chief officer and a senior customs rummage officer in navy blue dungarees. Wilfy closed the door gently.

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“Everything all right, Ferring?” asked the ships officer assuming his senior cadet was doing some sort of routine check of the CO2 room.

“Fine, sir, just a last checking of the pressures I should have done three days ago.”

Wilfy stepped aside and horror of horrors he witnessed the Chief Officer snap the padlock on the door and the customs officer put a band with a metal seal through the same hasp.

Inside Bronnie heard nothing more after the door closed. The darkness was absolute and the silence was eerie as the noises of the ship's machinery had stopped. Perhaps that's why the lights went out! There was a faint hissing, almost imperceptible, but ominous. She thought it might be gas but there was no tell-tale smell. Suddenly she was very frightened, not understanding the workings of this great steel machine in which she was incarcerated. She tried to convince herself that Wilfy would be back. He loved her and cared for her after all. He would be back. She searched around on the steel floor of the compartment and bit by bit she found her clothes and with time on her side she started to put them back on. Her panties were wrapped up in the towel; her tight-fitting pink slacks were inside out, her bra was tangled with something but she managed to release it. Her little white bobby-sox were the last things to be found but her slip-on shoes were nowhere. She had dressed herself standing in one spot, too scared to move in case she touched something setting off the gas cylinders.

Whenever they had used this space she had noticed her pulse rate had quickened giving her a higher sense of arousal. Their couplings had lasted fifteen minutes at the most and except for a few close shaves they had escaped this room without incident. She was dressed and had nothing more to do so her fear became her only emotion. She decided to find the door and try to escape or raise the alarm. Her search for her clothes had completely disorientated her. Her sense of direction was nullified.

The room had been designed for a maximum number of 64 large cylinders but the actual installation was only 24 all interconnected with pipes; enough to protect only the engine room but none of the cargo holds. A trunking for the gas pipes about two feet square led down two decks being sealed at the bottom with glands as the pipes passed through.

She found the smooth wall of the room and with her hands flat against it made her way slowly in the direction she thought was towards the door. By this time she was panting fast and beginning to feel exhausted. As her foot hit the low sill of the descending trunkway she lost her balance finding nothing except the rubber mattress to steady her. Only just conscious she slumped into the wide open void hitting the back of her head on the sharp edge and her forehead on the pipes opposite, dragging with her the towel and the spontex mattress which lodged above her. The descent was through at least sixteen feet and the pit was full of poisonous carbon dioxide. She was unconscious before she landed at the bottom and dead a few minutes later.

Wilfy knew the spare key was on the emergency keyboard. He collected the torch from his cabin and got the key and was making his way up to the next deck when he was called by his cabin mate, Jones.

“Wilfy, you jammy bugger. Your cab’s here. They’re going to take you to head office for a briefing before you go to Japan. The Captain is in the cab waiting. Get your arse down there or he’ll leave you behind.”

“Right.” said Wilfy. “Do me a favour. Take this key, open the CO2 locker and let Bronnie out. That’s all. Ask no questions.”

“Oh shit, so you really were...*very* lucky man.”

“Yes, do it now. And explain to her that I had to rush. She’ll understand. We’ve said our good-byes, and give her a kiss from me.”

When Jones reached the door he was confused to find it not only locked but sealed with a customs seal. He knew these seals could be broken and then made to look as if they were still intact so he applied his seaman’s knife to it and opened the door fully to let the daylight flood in. He entered the room. He looked around, seeing nothing except the rows of cylinders he called out “Bronnie” a couple of times and then assumed she had been let out by the customs men in their search. He relocked the door, reset the tampered seal and left to replace the key on the emergency keyboard.

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6. OLLIE ON TRIAL FOR GROSS INDECENCY

Adrian had come aboard soon after the vessel had docked. He had gone straight to see Ollie who was absolutely ebullient. He met Bronnie in the cabin and was obviously surprised that Ollie was married. Bronnie, who saw how animated Ollie had become on meeting Adrian, decided she would leave. She had a train ticket to Cardiff, had arranged for her large suitcase to be sent by British Road Services and was ready to travel.

She gave Ollie a peck on the cheek, smiled at Adrian and left the room. As she crossed the vestibule she met Wilfy and they disappeared up to the boat deck.

The door of Ollie's stateroom remained shut for about an hour. Ollie and Adrian emerged went down the gangway and left the dock in Adrian's Mini. They went up to Frith Street in Soho to a famous Chinese restaurant called the Chan Dynasty. There they met some more chums there and their lunch lasted until about half past three. The excited conversation had included the new surfing movie called 'The Endless Summer' and Adrian suggested they go to see it. Ollie was dopy with all the food and rice wine and would have gone anywhere with Adrian.

The film was showing at a small cinema in Tooting. So they drove off down there and enjoyed the wonderful photography and the rhythmic "surf" music of the Sandals along with the beautiful physiques of the surfers as they sped through the waves. They went to the Admiral Rodney, a known 'queer' pub nearby

for a few drinks and a steak sandwich. Their animated conversation caught the attention of a good looking young man who joined in enthusiastically about the film and the 'London Scene' as he liked to call it. It had been Ollie's plan to kip on the sofa of Adrian's flat in Brixton. It was not long before the conversation turned to sex and how the new bill when enacted later in July would liberate 'gay' people as they now liked to be known. Sebastian, or Baz, suggested they make a threesome and go to someone's place for a bit of 'fun'.

"Let's take a bottle from here and go."

"I am sorry but my sister is in tonight and we cannot go to my flat," apologised Adrian.

"Never mind," said Baz, "there's a little hotel just round the corner, clean but not expensive. Why don't we go there?"

So at around ten thirty they left the pub and Ollie checked into the Bright Star Hotel. The receptionist did not ask any questions, simply demanded payment up front and a ten pound deposit to be refunded on departure. The other two came in a few minutes later and they all went up the stairs.

They sat around rather subdued at first drinking wine and then vodka which Baz had ordered across the bar but Ollie had paid for. It was a warm night and Baz took off his shirt and then started undressing Ollie who was lying with head in Adrian's lap. Soon they were naked except for Baz who kept his trousers on. They both loved him and kissed him for his very boyish and happy face. Ollie and Adrian both thought he was beautiful but

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they also admired each other. Soon they got down to the serious stuff. Baz said he would join in later but he didn't want to come between the two obvious lovers. He then produced a Minox 9.5 millimetre camera and started to take pictures.

When Adrian protested Baz said, "You'll love these. I can get them developed and printed by a very discrete guy who will blow them up to eight by five and you can keep them as a memento."

Suddenly Adrian snapped to his senses. He saw very clearly how things might be if this boy were to have the pictures. It could lead to a disaster.

"Give it here," he shouted, "you little bastard I know your game."

He leapt for the camera with his right hand pushing Baz's left against the window sill. The camera dropped out of the window.

A few moments later Baz made for the door of the room and slunk out carrying his shirt. As he left two burley policemen entered the room. The two naked men were trapped. Out of the corner of his eye Ollie saw another two coppers on the grass outside the window and Adrian in his white shirt joined them.

Two men and a woman were on the bench at the magistrates' court, Camberwell Green.

“Please state your names to the court.”

“Oliver Francis Watkins”, “Adrian Kerry Foley”

“Oliver Francis Watkins and, Adrian Kerry Foley you stand accused of certain immoral behaviour contrary to The Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885.

“The first count: that on or about the sixth of July you together repaired to the Bright Star Hotel, Battersea, where you took a room and were engaged in illegal acts known in the law as Sodomy.”

“How do you plead on the first count Oliver Francis Watkins?”

“Not guilty, sir.”

“And Adrian Kerry Foley how do you plead?”

“Not guilty, sir”

“The second count: that on or about the sixth of July you and another party or parties repaired to the Bright Star Hotel where you took a room and were engaged in acts known in the law as Gross indecency. How do you plead to the second count?”

“Not guilty, sir.”, “Not guilty, sir.”

The ‘not guilty’ pleas were on the advice of his solicitor. “I’ve seen the pictures. They can’t use them.”

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Ollie was visibly frightened by the whole scenario. He could barely hold his tears back. He hated having to tell lies.

“The prosecution may present their case.” said the leading magistrate.

“You represent the prosecution. Please state your name, position and your qualification”

“My name is Arthur Black and I am retained by the Police as prosecuting solicitor. I am a registered with the Law Society.

“You may continue Mr. Black.”

“On the night of the sixth of July at about ten thirty p.m. the accused were seen leaving the Admiral Rodney pub. They had been eating and drinking for some time.

“The accused were observed entering the Bright Star Hotel and they booked in went immediately to a bedroom. Officers saw both men at the window of the room both bare-chested and embracing.

“The officers decided this was a breach of the Criminal Law Amendment Act and sought permission to raid the room to get *in flagrante* evidence. They obtained a duplicate key from reception and entered the room without warning. The accused were both standing naked in the room. One of the beds was in disarray and the atmosphere was described as “steamy” by one of the constables.

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“A camera (offered in evidence as exhibit No 1) was found beneath the window. This camera was sent to the police laboratory and the film developed and enlarged prints were made (exhibit No 2). Sparing the lady magistrate’s sensitivities it is sufficient to say the photographs show the two men indulging in obscene and illegal acts.”

Mr. Black paused and turned over the page of his notes.

“The officers cautioned the two men and told them to get dressed. When asked what they were doing one of the accused said he was going to bed and the other party said he was going to have a shower. The room has a small shower cubical. They were asked if they were homosexuals to which both refused to answer.

“The police case is that the two men were caught *in flagrante* conducting themselves obscenely as evidenced by the photographs, committing sodomy and other gross perversions.

“I call three witnesses, namely: the receptionist who booked the two men into their room, the police sergeant in charge of the raid and the police constable who found the camera.”

“Call the first witness,” called the clerk after getting the nod from the magistrate.

The reception clerk was sworn in and he confirmed that he had checked in the accused men and allocated them room twenty five and given them one key. They had booked for one night only. He hadn’t checked their identity. They were English and it was not required. He was thanked and dismissed.

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A large policeman with sergeants' chevrons on his immaculate uniform carrying his helmet under his left arm entered the court and was directed to the witness box.

After he had given his name and number and had sworn in he repeated word for word what Mr. Black had already said.

"You may cross examine the witness." said the magistrate.

"Thank you, Sir, he said turning to the witness. "Sergeant, what drove you and your colleague to carry out a raid on the room of two men who happened to be sharing a room with two beds?"

"We had information from observers that there were two queers... er, I mean, homosexuals in the room, sir."

"Were these observers peeping in through the window?"

"Observing, sir."

"Through the window"

"Yes."

"And where were these observers standing?"

"On the pavement directly outside the window."

"From about seventeen feet below the window were the observers able to see what was going on in the room?"

"They saw two naked men."

"I put it to you that all they could see was the torsos of men who from time to time passed the window."

"Yes, sir. At one time they were kissing and caressing."

"Were you, yourself, one of the observers?"

"I was horrified."

"Please answer the question."

"No."

"May we now consider the photographs? I have examined these pictures carefully. While I can see vile acts concerning the genitalia of two men, in none of the pictures are the faces of the men clear. Furthermore in order for these pictures to be taken there must have been a third person in the room. This Minox camera cannot be operated remotely and the prosecution has not mentioned the presence of a third person."

"Correct, sir."

"Are you able to produce the third person as a witness?"

"No."

"The camera was found on the grass outside the room in question?"

"Yes, sir."

"How many storeys has this hotel?"

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The policeman consulted his pocket book.

"Floors one to five above the ground floor."

"The room in question is number twenty five. There is a room immediately below and three rooms directly above. Could the camera have dropped from any of the rooms above or below?"

After a long pause the sergeant replied, "Yes, it is possible."

"The police were requested to have the camera sent to an independent laboratory to test for fingerprints. Are you aware of this?"

"Yes, sir"

"Do you know the result of the test?"

"No, sir"

"I submit as evidence a report from Evidence Laboratories Limited. In this report it is clear that there is only one set of prints on the camera. These prints do not match the prints of either of the accused."

The solicitor paused and looked up to the bench. He thought he was having the right effect.

"The constable who accompanied you said he felt the room was steamy inferring that this indicated energetic activity. It did not occur to you that a man using a shower cubicle in a small bedroom would make it steamy."

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This was just to ridicule the policemen.

“I have completed my cross examination, sir.”

The chairman banged his gavel on the desk and ordered a short recess. The three magistrates returned ten minutes later.

“We have considered the case against the accused and the evidence. We find the evidence is inconclusive. Case dismissed.”

7. OLIVER'S REMAND FOR MURDER AND SUICIDE.

The press were in a feeding frenzy because of the impending change in the law. Reporting on the Wolfenden Report had been a newspaper seller and it was coming to a head with the Sexual Offences Bill which was to become law soon. The differences it would make to the homosexual community were profound and as such caused enormous opposition from every reactionary and hypocritical group imaginable. The gutter press and others were never far behind in condemning and vilifying anything that smacked of liberalization.

Unfortunately for Oliver a young female body had been found floating in the King George the Fifth dock. Bronnie had been a missing person for a week. She was still on their hot list but was about to be downgraded. And so it was that, as Oliver left the court in Camberwell, he was immediately arrested and bundled into a black van to be taken on remand to Brixton Prison.

The Evening Standard, who had a stringer at Camberwell, was able to cobble together a story under the headline "Queer acquitted"

EVIDENCE DISMISSED

NOW MURDER SUSPECT

GOES STRAIGHT TO BRIXTON PRISON.

For technical reasons the evidence presented by the police, at Camberwell Magistrates Court today, which may have consisted of extreme photographs of the accused and another man cavorting and worse, could not be allowed. The Magistrate asked for back up evidence which was not presented.

By Roger Sharpthorne

It is suspected that one of the men recently released from a charge of sodomy due to lack of evidence may have murdered his wife on arrival on board a cargo ship of the famous Foster Timms line in London. The police have announced that they found a young female body in the King George the Fifth Dock where the couple's vessel was moored.

Inspector Lock of the East London and Royal Docks Constabulary said: "A body of a woman, probably in her twenties, has been found in the dock and we suspect foul play in her demise. Forensic examination is in progress and we will update the press as any results become clear."

There followed a brief and largely fabricated, biography of Oliver, his career in the Merchant Navy, his boarding school education and finally his appearance in the Camberwell Green Magistrates Court.(see comment on page 30).

His mother and father visited him. His father was naturally very cold and puzzled by the whole situation. His mother tearful and sympathetic could not believe he could do such a thing. "Why couldn't you work things *out*. If you weren't compatible, oh, I don't know. You couldn't *possibly* have killed anyone. It's just not possible. My little boy couldn't *kill* anyone."

All this did was to drive Ollie into himself and he imagined that, perhaps, his sexual inadequacy had driven Bronnie to suicide. He had never believed she could do such a thing but he realised he did not know her. Primarily in his mind during the voyage had been images of his friendship with Adrian, how he related to the other men on board and how much Wilfy had meant to him. Did Wilfy do it? He could not bring himself to believe that, but he knew Bronnie and Wilfy had a special relationship from which he was excluded and, perhaps, Wilfy was a killer. These things plagued him while he was locked up in the small remand cell. Shame was killing him. He was especially ashamed of his recent run-in with the police. He loved Adrian and yet that had been the first time they had broken all the sexual taboos. It was almost as if the beauty of their relationship had been in their restraint. They had had a normal man to man friendship albeit extremely intense and deep but it had not been about sex. But the demon had raised its head and been a serpent of unimaginable power.

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He flushed from head to toe remembering each incident in the room. It had been Baz and Adrian who had led all the activity but he had joined in and enjoyed every moment. After the restraints of trying to enjoy sex with Bronnie it had come as an enormous wave of relief to be there body to body with his best and most adorable friend. That horrible little squirt Baz was somewhere in the background and he thought he was going to join in for some more 'fun' but suddenly the whole scene came to an end as Adrian launched himself at Baz, Baz disappeared and they were standing naked with two coppers in the room.

The disaster replayed in his mind over and over again.

The slot in the door opened and a plate of cold food was passed in. No word was spoken. He went over to the shelf to see what had been placed there. It was obviously excrement. He retched at the sight of it and retreated to the far end of the concrete bed. Tears filled his eyes and he wept as he had never wept before. Deep sobs coming up from the lowest place in his abdomen and filling his head.

There was no stopping them.

The peep hole slid open. "Aven't cher finished yer supper? Clean plites only can be returned in five minutes."

He took the plate and the wooden spatula provided and scraped it into the stainless steel, seatless, lidless toilet. He pulled the lever to no effect. There was no water in the cistern. The fat turd would remain and the stink now released by contact with the water would plague him all night.

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He suddenly feared torture. This situation was torture enough but the viciousness of the general male population towards his sort was enough to invoke really serious harm and now he was branded a wife murderer. Uxoricide he uselessly remembered was the term used. Wife killing. Why did he remember such inane word at such a time?

He lay down on the concrete bed and pulled the thin unhygienic blanket over him. Of course, he did not sleep much. His own head was keeping him awake as was the general noise from the prison. Screams and grunts came in through the locked door as did snatches of conversation. Occasionally the bang of a nearby door shocked him awake trembling all over.

In the morning he heard the bang, crash, wallop of the other floors being woken and slopping out. Only the remand cells had the dubious luxury of flush toilets which did not flush. There was quiet between what he reckoned to be seven and eight o'clock. The door was opened and an officer came in. "You are free. They I.D'ed the body in the K.G.five. A dockside tart. Follow me. Leave that blanket and anything else belonging to the service"

Oliver followed the screw down a long passage towards the reception area.

"Sign here for your valuables and personal effects: one watch, one pair of cufflinks." He paused , "One small hold-all containing discharge book, seaman's card, master's certificate of competency, wallet with sixteen pounds ten shillings, cigarettes: fifteen in packet, a striped shirt, a pair of soiled underwear, a pair

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of cotton pyjamas, one pair of cotton trousers, two pairs of socks, a wash bag with usual items.”

He looked up dully at the officer “and my gold signet ring?”

The expression on the face of the officer was imperturbable. “No signet ring,” he said. “Sign here, sir. Then you can go. At the front desk you will collect a railway warrant to your home. Show it to the bus conductor to travel on the bus to Waterloo.” The contempt in his voice was palpable.

He decided he was too tired to bother with a mere family heirloom. He signed.

Out in the fresh air he walked toward Brixton Hill and saw a small public park on the opposite side. He crossed and sat on a bench. It was a bright day but his thoughts were more macabre than he thought possible. He was at the nadir of emotion and was planning suicide with total resolve. He no longer wanted to rationalise or seek reasoning to ameliorate his situation. It was just too bad to handle and his life was spent: no credit left, no chance of redemption.

After a while he started to walk down the hill toward Adrian's flat but he knew he could not meet Adrian today. A bus stopped with the platform immediately in front of him. One step to side and he was inside. He took a seat just inside, perched over the rear wheels.

“Where to chum?” said the conductor.

“To Waterloo,” he replied as he showed the conductor the warrant.

“Right-oh, mate Waterloo, you are.”

On the south side of the river Oliver alighted from the bus and started walking North West across Vauxhall Bridge. The tide was out and the muddy stream was narrow. His resolve was absolutely clear. He was a man of achievement; the worst thing that could happen now was to fail in this, his last endeavour. His life was unbearable now, but self torture would follow failure. He got to a spot where he thought the water would wash his body away and climbed the balustrade then he stood for a second and dived head-first into abyss. He had misjudged the middle of the stream so where he fell the water was only a few inches deep. His head hit the mud and his neck was instantly broken.

He was seen by about twenty people on a bus coming on behind him. The driver was oblivious to the scene. A rapid ringing of the bell made him stop. The well-meaning passengers looked at each other and over the balustrade to see the body of the man lying broken with the water washing over him. One man broke away from the crowd and ran for the telephone box at the north end of the bridge. Not long after a police car and a motorcyclist arrived. The motorcyclist had PRESS on the left breast of his leather jacket.

8. THE FINAL VOYAGE OF "PUTRA"

'm.s. Putra' had left London with a special cargo of armaments for Karachi and was destined to be beached and broken up at the infamous Gadani Beach when the cargo had been delivered.

Wilfy just promoted to Second Officer had joined in London and helped to supervise the loading of the cargo by army handlers. Rather than the regular stevedores, who refused to handle the cargo for political reasons, squaddies were being used to load the shipment of high explosives and other weaponry. The army officers could not supervise this kind of activity and the soldiers were untrained. At times he and his fellow officers had to intervene because of the dangerous way they had slung the cargo.

The outbound voyage was a general disaster. As they passed Lisbon they had been diverted from the Mediterranean because the Egyptians had given notice that they would not allow the armaments to pass through the Suez Canal. They had bunkered in Nigeria to get the fuel needed for the longer voyage round the Cape of Good Hope, but the port of Lagos was blocked and the anchorages were full of ships trying to offload cargoes of cement and other building materials. After a week an ancient bunker barge had arrived and they had taken a hundred tons of heavy fuel oil. They suffered five breakdowns on the way to Cape Town due to water in the fuel. All the engineers and especially the watch officers were continually worried about being stopped dead-in-the-water at any time of day or night. The vessel had to

call in at Durban for essential revictualling because they had run out of most food items loaded in London for the shorter voyage through the Suez Canal.

In Durban some of the lascars got into trouble going on to a 'whites only' beach. This delayed the progress of the voyage by one day as the captain had to pay their fines. Then they were delayed another day because news came through that an aircraft had spotted an oil slick as the ship progressed past Port Elizabeth. Rudimentary environmental laws were in force to protect the famous surfing beaches. The Chief Engineer was at his wit's end trying to make the fuel fit for the engines by removing the water but had nowhere to discharge the residual water except into the sea. The captain then had to cable back to London to get this second outrageous fine paid. He was becoming a nervous wreck because he feared London would dump him without pension for his incompetence. The Chief Engineer was beginning to have the same qualms.

By the time they arrived in Karachi the whole ship's company was ragged with exhaustion. The highly explosive cargo was unloaded by a mix of soldiers and coolies on to ancient Second World War army lorries and some on to camel carts. Here the army officers were very respectful but at the same time much too self important and gung-ho to get seriously involved in the unloading of heavy, delicate cargoes.

There was a mass of paperwork to do to decommission the vessel ready to hand over to the breakers. London bureaucrats sent lists of things to be salvaged and freighted back, many of

which existed only in their imaginations. Some officers had wanted to take things from the ship but it was made clear that everything had to be accounted for. Endless lists of “loose gear” had to be checked. Into Wilfy’s domain came the bridge instrumentation: compasses, brass dividers, parallel rulers, azimuth rings, the chronometers and a host of publications all had to be listed and packed for the benefit of management in London. All of the officers knew the exercise was futile because most of the objects would be lost or stolen in transit. But it had to be done. They all worked out their stress with gin and tonic or, for the older hands, “pink” gin, after starting at breakfast time with canned lager or stronger, local Murree beer and collapsing at nine or ten in the evening straight to bed. During this time the services on board were sporadic so showers were infrequent and the toilets flushed randomly.

One day Wilfy had noticed, as he crossed the boat deck, the door of the CO2 room was open and peaking inside he saw the gas cylinders had all gone. The Third Engineer was leaning over the railing staring down at the wharf.

“Hey Jordie what’s going on?”

“Wha’ j’mean pal?”

“The gas bottles.”

“Look, man, down there on the camel carts.”

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And sure enough two camels were plodding away off the dock pulling carts made of reconstructed flatbed trucks. The cylinders were tied down in neat rows.

“We’ll all get a wee bonus from them, maybe a case of beer. The Chief says they weren’t on the inventories so he’s mobilized them for his own benefit, and ours. A pretty penny he’ll be getting and we’ll all get a bit of a dib. You’ll never guess what those coolies found in the bottom of the locker,” he paused for effect: “A corpse, man. Probably just a shipyard worker.”

He remembered the last time he had seen the inside of the room his heart missed a beat and he began to feel physically sick. The engineer saw his pallor.

“You alright, pal? You look as if you’ve seen a ghost.”

“I’m OK, mate. It’s just an old memory. Nothing at all and I’ll have one of your beers when you get paid out. See you later, Jordie.”

Wilfy went down to his cabin and sat on the bunk while his heartbeat subsided. He leant down and opened the drawer under his bunk and hefted a half bottle of whisky to his mouth. Fortified he had a further duty to perform.

He had to assist the local agent paying off the crew. With nothing to lose most of the Lascars argued vehemently about overtime payments and severance. Wilfy was generally sympathetic to the crewmen trying to ameliorate the hard line

taken by the officious *babu* whose job it was to minimize the company's liabilities and, no doubt, maximise his *buckshee*.

When that bunfight was over he went to his cabin to change his shirt. It was the general rule that the second third and fourth officers had the shared service of a steward. He was an old man, Francisco Valera, "Chico". He was dodderly at his job but they respected him and forgave him his foibles. They knew his poor performance was partly their own fault for slipping him the odd bottle of gin from time to time. He was being retired after discharge in Karachi and would be going home to Goa to enjoy his meagre pension. Wilfy had been clearing up his own cabin the night before the crew was to be discharged. He had set aside five pounds for tipping "Chico" and the Chief Cook. Not seeing it on the desk under a brass paperweight where he'd left it, he checked his wallet. He hunted high and low for it. He had been drinking beer all day and although he was not inebriated his judgement was no doubt impaired. He asked the cadets if they had taken it for any reason and he then asked Chico if he had seen it. Chico immediately thought he was being accused of something and his demeanour became defensive and suspicious. In the end Wilfy was convinced of his guilt.

"That sly old bugger! We have befriended him and kept him on long past his useful life. That old bastard took my money, I am sure." So he reported him to the Chief Steward. On top of all the other detritus he had to put up with the last thing he wanted was to adjudicate over some old man stealing a five pound note.

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“Look, if you’re certain I’ll call the agent and he’ll hand the case over to the cops. But don’t expect me to help. In the mean time look for the bloody thing yourself. It’s a month’s wages for a steward so it’s a serious accusation.”

Wilfy went away and joined the others in a pour-out to celebrate the demise of this rust-bucket called “Putra”

“Who the fuck would call a ship a name like that? Surely they won’t use that name again. Can you imagine a fast container ship called ‘Putra’?”

The next morning the Chief Steward mentioned Wilfy’s complaint to the agent and two police constables came on board and arrested Chico. As he was taken away Wilfy had misgivings. Did he really believe this lovely old man would steal a five pound note however desperate? He then went down to his cabin and sat down to check on this own packing. He had purloined one souvenir: a station pointer which had not appeared on any inventory. It was not a large or valuable item but something he would remember this old ship by.

Just under the polished mahogany box he saw the five pound note.

“Oh shit,” he said out loud. He remembered moving the box from the desk to his cabin trunk. The currency must have stuck to the underneath.

He immediately left his cabin and went up to the Chief Steward’s office. “Where’s Chico?”

“He was obliged to go ashore with two police constables, not under arrest as yet, but to make a statement at the police station.”

“Fuck! He didn’t take it. I’ve just found it.”

“They’ll probably beat him up a bit until he confesses. It’s what they do. Then they’ll squeeze him for some of his wages. If you want to get him out of trouble walk up there and tell the Inspector it was all a big mistake. You will probably have to bribe the man to let him go. He’ll be like a dog with a bone.”

Wilfy decided he must go and get the unfortunate Chico out of trouble. He was very surprised when he arrived at the police station to be sat down immediately, opposite the Police Inspector in his office. There were three others in the room: Chico, and the two coolies he had seen on the camel cart.

“I can explain,” Wilfy started, “this man is innocent and I must apologise for making trouble for him by my own very bad mistake.”

“I see,” said the Police Inspector. “Are you Mr. Ferring the Second Officer of the ‘Putra?’” he asked raising a large bushy eyebrow.

“Yes that’s why I’m here to clear Valera’s name and get him off the hook. He’s innocent. I made a stupid mistake and he took nothing.”

“This man, Valera, has been telling me about an incident in London which may connect you to the mystery of a corpse these men fear is present in the locker where they were working.

“He has come up with a witness statement concerning you. According to him he saw you and a young woman entering the space in question when the vessel was docked in London five years ago. He has stated that the woman, the wife of Mr. Oliver Watkins, was with you shortly before she was posted as missing. His solemnly written statement specifically points to your involvement with this young woman.”

He continued: “In the mean time the cylinder space and the immediate surroundings will be secured and subjected to scrutiny by me and a forensic team.

“Valera will be released but in no circumstances are you to speak to him or contact him in any way.”

Khan then rang a bell on his desk. Another officer in a smart uniform and turban entered and stood to attention.

“Sergeant, this steward needs to be accompanied down to the ‘Putra’. He will collect his pay, his documents and all his personal effects. You will give him quarters in the lines. He will mess with you. We may have to keep him here a few days as a material witness.” Khan took a sheet of paper and wrote a note for the sergeant to show why he was removing Valera to the care of the police. “I will go down to the ship to investigate the locker.”

Having sullied the crime scene thoroughly, the two coolies had gone to the third engineer, who had been directing their work with the gas bottles, and jabbered incomprehensibly leading him up to the boat deck and the CO2 locker but he could not see their discovery which remained deep in the trunkway hidden by a mattress and a soiled towel. They had then gone to the police station to report to the Superintendent. Khan had come back to the ship with them and under his supervision they had removed the mattress and the towel and saw the body.

The *serang* was called to provide a rope and one of them climbed down and tied a rope under her arms and round her chest and they pulled her out. The corpse had been dead for at least five years and was dry like a mummy and very brittle.

Khan was standing on the deck while the coolies and the crew rescued the body. One of the coolies presented him with a woollen pullover taken from the woman's arm and Khan made sure it was bagged as evidence.

Wilfy went about his tedious duties on board until Khan tracked him down in the ship's office. The Captain was also present.

"I have to tell you I am not happy with the developments. We found, a navy blue pullover. It occurs to me that this is vital evidence placing you or a man of similar size at some time inside the locker. The coolie says it was in the hand of the deceased and around her arm. It is a male garment and looks as if it might fit a man of your build. I therefore have no option but to instruct the

Captain to detain you until we either clear the matter up or arrest you in connection with her death.”

Wilfy was absolutely stunned by the accusation but also very frightened as he knew that a statement from Valera had plausibility. He had completely forgotten the pullover but he could now remember that in the hurry to get out of the locker he may have left it inside. He hoped his fear did not show as he sat in shocked silence.

“You will not be locked up but I will take charge of your seaman’s documents and your passport while you continue with your valuable duties here on board. I must now collect the aforementioned documents, Captain. Is that clear? If you wish to say anything regarding this situation now, I will have to caution you. You may remain silent until such time as you may be arrested and questioned,” he stated in the stilted formal manner of policemen throughout the world.

9. FIRST INVESTIGATION AND PROSECUTION AFTER KARACHI

Marine Superintendent Captain George Flint and the directors of the Foster Timms Steamship Company were not pleased with the news that 'Putra' was held up in Karachi. The ship would not be released to the breakers' beach until the matter of the dead woman was cleared up and Foster Timms would not get their money from the breaker. Although some of their expenses for the crew might be covered by their Protection and Indemnity insurance they would still lose a pretty penny. The directors dispatched Flint, to Karachi to sort out the mess.

Ayub Khan had ensured that the evidence, however obscure, was gathered from the CO2 compartment and bagged for presentation to Detective Inspector Monroe on his arrival.

At the inquest at the High Court in Karachi it became clear that nobody was very interested in the corpse until they realised that this incident would slow down the process of sale and movement the vessel to the dismantling site and the subsequent repatriation of the body and the crew to England and the end of the nightmare voyage for good and all time.

Scotland Yard sent Detective Inspector Monroe to liaise with the Pakistani Police and bring the suspect home if he found sufficient evidence. From the Metropole Hotel, he and Flint made frequent forays to the courts and legal offices riding in splendour in ancient Buick or Studebaker taxis or on cracked

leather upholstery in battered Austins or, if these weren't available, in three wheeled motor rickshaws.

The huge Pathan, Police Inspector Ayub Faisal Khan, having restrained Wilfy on suspicion of homicide, conceded to Monroe that Wilfy would be tried in England. He insisted he come to London as he had to swear the veracity of Francisco Valera's statement, describe his investigation and present statements from the pathologist and the two coolies who had led to the discovery of the body. Flint and Monroe made a good friend of Ayub Khan. Flint promised him that Foster Timms would pay his expenses in England and Khan promised to clear red tape with alacrity. The three drank *chota pegs* of whisky at the Gymkhana Club in the evenings looking over the Maidan watching the cricket players until, as the sun went down, they drew stumps and shuffled back to the pavilion.

Flint finally managed to clear the ship for demolition and the "Putra" was towed round to Gadani. That was the end of her. She was beached and put under the oxy-acetylene torches within minutes.

Khan and Monroe arrested and charged Wilfy with unlawful homicide on the morning of the same day.

Khan, handcuffed to Wilfy was somewhat put out when he and Wilfy were allocated seats at the back of the Comet 4 while Flint and Munroe, in a quasi colonial fashion, were in First Class up front. They stopped for fuel at Beirut and Rome giving them a chance to stretch their legs while Wilfy and Khan were obliged to remain seated in the back of the plane.

At Heathrow Wilfy was handed over to the local constabulary who were somewhat less gentle. He was pushed into the back of a shaky black Maria, spending the first night in a holding cell in Hounslow and then on to be processed at Wandsworth. He was held in remand for three months and taken to the Old Bailey for trial. He had frequent visits from his London barrister appointed by his father on the advice of his local solicitor in Hampshire. It was agreed that the testimony of the steward, Valera, was critical but the bagged pullover, found around the woman's arm, was shoved into store in an obscure police station in Plaistow, in the East End of London where Wilfy was transferred for a few days before the trial. All other evidence was codified sufficiently for it to go before the Admiralty Court in the Old Bailey.

Second officer "Wilfy" Ferring was in the dock awaiting the return of the jury. He had just endured a week of indisputable yet incomprehensible testimony against him. He was sure he was going to be sent down for manslaughter, but he was also charged with the more serious crime of murder.

It had all been brain stunning. Six weeks ago he had no idea that he had committed any crime at all, but the evidence put before the jury had raised in him the suspicion that five years ago he had precipitated the death of a young woman on board a ship and that the court might consider it to be an act of murder or at least manslaughter.

His QC had advised him against pleading guilty to murder or even the lesser charge of manslaughter on the basis that the

criminal record would blight the rest of his life and that, being a very eminent Q.C., he had sufficient arguments to get him off.

After all the formalities of the court procedure and the opening statements from the prosecution and his defence barrister the first witness was called:

“ Mr. Valera, you have stated that you saw the accused enter the carbon dioxide locker with the victim in London on the 25th May 1965. Please tell the jury how you came to be on the boat deck to see them.”

“Yes, sir, my lord.” There was a pause as the old man gathered his thoughts. “You see the Captain sahib needed gin. The old captain was a Scotchman, Captain Mudie, only drank whisky, no like gin. New man wanted gin-tonic. He called the Chief Steward to get gin but the bonded store was sealed - customs. Captain said to me ‘Chico, Chief Steward says there is a cupboard in the officers’ wardroom marked ‘board games’ with some bottles in it. The key is hanging behind the bar. Take this chitty, get a bottle of Gordon’s and leave the chitty in the cupboard.’ I said ‘yes sir.’ I knew about cupboard. It was for emergencies. Customs turned blind eye about it.”

“So this has established why you were on the boat deck. When did you see the accused and what was he doing?”

“When I was coming back, sir. Number one cadet, Mr. Wilfy, was going into CO2 locker and second officer’s wife was with him.”

“And what did you think of this?”

“Not thinking, sir. Not my business. Only Captain's special steward; Captain needs gin.”

“What happened next?”

“Nothing, sir. Door closed. I took gin. Not see number one cadet or woman again.”

“Please tell the court how you know it was the Second Officer's wife with Mr. Ferring? Did you identify her positively.”

“It was a woman.”

“Perhaps it was his girl friend visiting the ship.”

“No visitors, sir. Customs still on board. Ship not cleared for visitors. No other womans on board”

“How did you identify the senior cadet? Was he wearing uniform?”

“No sir. Mufty, sir.”

“Do you have any doubt that it was him?”

“No, sir. Surely, I am saying the truth, sir.”

“How did know it was CO2 locker?”

“Door is black with CO2 painted white, big letters, no mistake.”

“Mr. Valera, please tell the jury what is your position now?”

“Yes, sir, my lord. I am pensioner.”

“And who pays your pension? How much is your pension?”

“I am receiving maximum pension, sir, after forty two years service, sir. The amount is two hundred and twenty rupees from Foster Timms Company, sir.”

“Have you received any of this money?”

“Yes, sir”

“Mr. Valera, why were you arrested in Karachi?”

“There was false accusation against me.”

“You had in your possession a five pound note, did you not?”

Valera nodded.

“The note you stole from the Second Officer, Mr. Ferring?”

“No, sir. It was all false and I was crying ‘it was not me’. The ignorant constables only speak Urdu. I am Christian. I do not steal from my officer.”

“Yes, of course. Can you tell the court what happened then?”

“Nobody believed me. They threw me in a cell with a very nasty, drunk, ignorant Sindi man. But there was big kerfuffle

going on in the station. Coming and going and shouting orders. Sindi man said in English that the coolies are saying there is a dead body in the CO2 room on your ship. 'You know about this? Tell me the story, are you murderer, little servant boy?' Then he shouted, 'This man knows about the dead man in the CO2 room!' Sindi man was just making trouble."

"Did anything happen after that?"

"Sergeant came in. He speak little English. I told him 'I have evidence of very bad hanky panky on this ship' and he said, 'what hanky panky?' 'maybe murder,' I said."

"And then what happened?"

"Very big man, Pathan. Uniform starched very stiff, stripes in gold and medals on chest, big turban with bronze badge. He came to the cell and a constable grabbed me and pushed me upstairs to this *burra-sahib's* office. Two coolies were there with another stinking constable."

"What did this Officer want?"

" 'What about this hanky-panky murder?' He asked me in English language, sir."

"What else, Mr. Valera?"

"I was very frightened. He was very big Pathan. He must be killing many criminals in his time. So I said, 'I have seen things happening in the CO2 locker.' Then he turned to the two coolies and spoke in common Urdu. They were gabbling back in that

language. He looked back at me. "These men say they smelt death in that locker. These men know the smell of death." "

"What did you think about this? Were you surprised?" asked the barrister.

"I was thinking, sir. There was a rumour that the Second Officer's wife had disappeared after London five years ago. It came out in the trial, sir. Second officer, Mr. Watkins, was in court for immoral crimes, unnatural sins of the flesh. It was in the newspaper. There was a rumour that he killed his wife. He was charged with murder. He is dead now, during the trial. They say suicide in the newspaper."

The Q.C. turned the judge: "That is all my lord."

"The defence may cross examine the witness."

"It must have been very distressing Mr. Valera, that after forty two years of loyal service you are falsely accused of stealing from the very officer you have served so loyally."

"Yes, sir, I was very unhappy and thought I would be discharged there in Pakistan with no money and no pension and go to jail. I thought I should die. But I prayed that the money would be found and all would be well." Chico looked as if he was going to burst into tears immediately.

"I can imagine your distress; the jury can imagine your distress I am sure. Being a man with his back against the wall, so to speak, you would naturally look for a solution to your difficulty, a way out."

Wilfy's barrister had made a statement but it was almost a question.

Chico was not quick enough to see the trap.

"Yes, sir, I wanted to get away from the stinking police station, the ignorant constables and the big Pathan. I was frightened and scared."

"Of course you were frightened but still thinking intelligently, able to make a plan. I put it to you that you, knowing the first suspect for the murder was dead, you thought: 'here's my chance to get out of here. Here's my chance for revenge'."

"No, no, sir. Not revenge but truth."

"You took advantage of this vague report of the smell of death told by the two coolies and concocted this story so you could get the second officer into trouble and at the same time get off the charge of theft against you."

Valera was visibly shaken by the barrister. He paled through his wrinkled dark skin. Obviously a man who had been bullied and bossed around all his life by various types of white men he was now called upon to save his honour by speaking up.

"No sir. I made statement, sir. Long statement typing out and signed."

Wilfy's Q.C. asked, "Is this your statement?"

"Yes, sir. Looks like."

"This statement," said the barrister with a light contempt, holding up a sheet of brownish, faded typescript "Did you have any help with making it?"

"No, sir"

The judge interrupted.

"There will be a short adjournment. Please arrange for copies of this statement to be issued to the members of the jury. The clerk will see to it." The judge stood and disappeared through the door behind him.

There was a recess for twenty minutes.

The jury sat as the clerk handed out the Roneoed re-typed copies of the statement which read as follows:

I, Francisco Valera, Steward on board the m.s. "Putra" make this truthful statement:

I have been accused of stealing a five pound note. I am innocent. I am rightly the owner of a five pound note obtained by selling certain merchandise in London on our last call there.

I wish to report suspicious behaviour which may have bearing on

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case arising with reference to Mr. William Ferring, Second Officer. This took place about five years ago in London when the same ship was in the King George the Fifth Dock. I saw Mr. Ferring and a woman enter the CO2 locker on the boat deck around about ten o'clock on the docking day. I did not see either of them again.

Signed: Francisco Valera

Witnessed Aiyub Faisal Khan, Police Inspector, Karachi West District

After a few minutes the clerk called for everyone to stand and the judge resumed his seat.

“You may resume your cross examination, Mr. Curtis.”

Curtis approached the witness stand, “Who typed this statement?” he asked with a shade of contempt for the document.

“I, sir, trained typist; ship's clerk before captain's steward. Pathan said I can use typewriter save him having to correct too many mistakes made by useless constable. I signed it: Francisco Valera. He signed it: Aiyub Faisal Khan, Police Inspector.” Chico said with a confident look of satisfaction.

“So you deny coming forward with your testimony simply to get out of jail.”

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"I deny it, sir. I was still in jail until Second Officer Wilfy found five pound note and told the Police Inspector." The barrister lifted an eyebrow. "I mean, Mr. Ferring, the defendant, there. I was in jail when they brought Second Officer in on charge of suspected murder. He was crying very much.

"The first thing he said to the big Pathan was 'that man is innocent I found it.' Then I felt bad. You see it was all a big mistake. They would have let me go to jail these sahibs. Just like colonials. They bloody not respectful of Indian people."

The judge intervened as Valera was beginning to scream his rant at the whole court.

"Thank you. Have we heard enough from this witness, Mr. Curtis?"

"Yes, m'lord"

The next witness to be sworn in was the engineer George "Geordie" Johnson.

"Mr. Johnson, You are Third Engineer officer on the 'Peking Ophir' now. Is that correct?" the prosecuting barrister stood looking confident as he warmed the witness up with some obvious questions.

"Yes, sir," answered Geordie Johnson.

"And what was your job back in April on the 'Putra' in Karachi?"

“I was an Assistant Engineer.”

“And what did your job as assistant engineer involve?”

“I was on day work assisting the Second Engineer in repairs and maintenance. I was not a watch keeper.”

“Had the trip been satisfactory for you?”

“Well, sir, we had difficulties and it fell to the second and me to try continually to keep the fuel clean by servicing the centrifuges and filters. It was almost a 24 hour job. The fuel we took in Nigeria was the worst fuel he had ever seen. By the time we got to Karachi we were both done in.”

“And what happened the day after you arrived?”

“I had a lay-in, and at around nine o'clock the Chief Engineer called me into his cabin. The Second was in there too. 'Sit down Geordie,' the second handed me a cold beer. Anyway after a bit of chat about how bad the trip had been the second suddenly said 'Arm yourself with a couple of spanners, lad, and go up and disconnect all the CO2 cylinders ready to ship them ashore.'

“‘Right,’ I said, ‘Will I finish me beer first?’ so I stayed a while and this Indian man came in. The Chief told me he was called Yusuf or somesuch. The man gave the Chief a fat envelope. The Chief peered inside and I glimpsed money. ‘Don’t worry, son. You’ll get your share. Just nip up free off those bottles and Yusuf’s gang will get them away. The Bosun’s already there rigging a derrick’

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“So, Mr. Johnson, was it your job to supervise the removal of gas cylinders from the CO2 locker when the vessel was in Karachi?”

“Aye, yes, sir. The Chief Engineer told me to disconnect each cylinder, remove the clamps and get the gang of men he sent up to lift them out and see them off the ship.”

“Did any of the ship’s crew see you or assist you?”

“Yes sir, the bosun and a couple of sailors topped a derrick and the bosun drove the winch to lower them on to the quay.”

“Were any other officers involved?”

“No, sir, just me.”

“What was the position of the door at this time?”

“It was open, hooked back, so there was plenty of air. This space is designated a confined space and must be well ventilated before anyone goes in.”

“Was there anything noticeable about the air in the space?”

“Not at first but as time went on it was a bad smell. I wanted to finish the job as quick as possible. I thought it might be hydrogen sulphide from the gas bottles. I’d read about it but I didn’t know much about it just that it has a bad smell and might be dangerous.”

“Did you close the door when you’d finished?”

“No, sir, but the Second Officer, Mr. Ferring, came by and he said I should shut it, so I did.”

“Did Mr. Ferring seem to think it was important to close the door?”

“Not really, sir, but he seemed a bit shocked. I put it down to the fact that he had seen us taking the bottles which, in retrospect, I realise, was stealing from the company. He then cheered up and said he'd be round for a beer later.”

“The two men, coolies, sent to help you by Mr. Yusuf, did you see them again, after the job was finished?”

“They left the ship and I saw them jump on the back of a camel cart as it left the dock. Then they came back an hour or more later with the Police Inspector. I was curious so I went up on the boat deck and they had hauled out the body of the woman.”

“When they were working with you, did they seem to be alarmed by the work or the location?”

“They got a bit excited when we were about halfway through the job. They were gabbling in Hindustani language. Yusuf had gone. I didn't think it strange at the time. They seemed worried about the smell in the room. We could all breathe O.K. and the job would be finished quickly so I just told them, *jaldi, jaldi*, hurry up, like.”

“So, to be absolutely clear: although the two coolies seemed to be alarmed by the air in the room, you were not because you

thought it was just the smell of the gas escaping as you released the cylinders. Is this the case?"

"Completely, sir. When I shut the door, at the suggestion of the Second Mate, er, Mr. Ferring, I just thought 'job done' and went to report to the Second Engineer."

"You say 'suggestion'. Did Mr. Ferring order you or instruct you to shut the door?"

"I don't think so; I guess he thought it looked untidy left open."

"What happened later?"

"The coolies returned with the Police Chief."

"Then what?"

"They went into the CO₂ room and they pulled her body out on a rope which the coolies had tied under her arms and round her chest. The corpse was dry like a mummy."

"Mr. Johnson, what were your feelings at this action?"

"I was horrified. It was the first time I had seen a corpse and this very shrivelled example would have horrified anybody."

The barrister half-turned to the jury as he said "Thank you, Mr. Johnson."

The greatest argument in his summing-up was the lack of motive and the denial by Wilfy. In his summing up his Q.C. made

much of the fact that the husband, Oliver Watkins, had been in court for homosexual acts and had committed suicide soon after the docking of the vessel in London. He inferred that homosexuals were unstable and his failed marriage was provocation for extreme action. The barrister had uncovered the arraignment of Ollie for the murder and inferred that his suicide might indicate guilt. It pained Wilfy that his dear friend Ollie was taking the blame for an act he definitely did not do while Wilfy himself was possibly, and ever more probably, the perpetrator. Wilfy was beginning to think the expensive brief was worth his fee although he was an arrogant and cruel bastard. Ollie was dead and Wilfy was alive to fight another day this logic supported his case but brought tears of guilt to his eyes.

On the third day the judge opened proceedings by requesting both the leading barristers to join him in chambers. He asked the prosecutor first: "Do you have any more witnesses or any hard evidence to support this conviction?"

The prosecutor said he had nothing more to offer.

The judge said, "I cannot allow this case to go before the jury where the evidence is inconclusive and may lead to a conviction base on prejudice or hearsay. It is therefore my intention to dismiss this case as the evidence brought up so far is circumstantial and has been effectively challenged.

"As the case is dismissed it does not prevent the charge being brought again if conclusive evidence is found."

Wilfy had been brought back to the dock around ten o'clock on the third day and to his absolute surprise when the judge re-entered the court and the jury had returned to their place, the judge stated, "The prosecution has no further evidence to bring to this case and the evidence so far is inconclusive and unreliable. I have therefore decided that proceedings should be halted and the case dismissed from this court."

Wilfy was stunned when the usher opened the gate and he left.

10. WILFY CONTUING HIS CAREER

Wilfy was relieved. There was no denying his lightened feelings. A court had accepted that he didn't do it. Of course, he felt very sad, even depressed about the fate of poor Bronnie, but she was water under the bridge – something that happened in another life.

He was puzzled as to how it happened. The autopsy report had mentioned contusions to her face and back of the neck. He couldn't imagine Jones had tussled with her. Perhaps he thought he could rape her in her vulnerable state, but no, Jones was a decent sort.

Well he wouldn't dwell on it. It was too painful and he had to straighten himself out and get on with his career. He decided not to go back to Foster Timms as he had heard there was a good life to be had on cruise liners. Sun Galactic cruises was advertising for navigation officers for their new cruise ships. This was the time when millions of dollars had been invested in an entirely new type of vessel designed only for the cruise market which was expected to boom in the coming decade and forever.

To Wilfy the macroeconomic was not an issue; he wanted a job and a glamorous one would do fine. He went as Second Officer and anticipated quick promotion as there a temporary shortage of officers and he was ideal cruise ship material.

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It was nothing but pleasure to go to Gieves and Hawkes to outfit himself with all the uniforms required including the black mess kit and the white 'bum freezer'.

As it happened, in the early seventies the Galactic line switched their marketing effort and schedules to Australia as the U.K. faced a recession and shortage of loose money. Their signature offering was the Japanese cherry blossom and summer cruises and, cruises to romantic Pacific islands of Fiji, Vanuatu, Tonga, Hawaii and the Western seaboard of the USA.

It was as First Officer that he fell for a pretty 'ChillyHo' (a Childrens' Hostess) called Amanda Bluff, ten years his junior. More likely she fell for him. The first thing she noticed was that he was a winner and would go far with his handsome upright appearance, very polished manner and obvious competence in everything he did.

She on the other hand was a winner at choosing the people in her life. Ever since she could talk she had organized her peers, wrapped her daddy round her little finger and run her mummy ragged, getting things done her way.

Of course Wilfy could not see this, in fact he welcomed the change from the various women he had encountered who had come on cruises to escape the strictures of home life. Many an engagee threw themselves at the men, particularly the officers in their smart uniforms, for a last sexual fling before the suburban lives they were bound for. Many young factory girls or secretaries were overwhelmed by the ambience on board and when invited to an officer's stateroom for drinks were all too easily seduced by

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the sweet talk and sophistication, as they saw it, or the rough and ready propositions of the engineers.

Veronica was a different kettle of fish. She had a strategy. Not for her, the blatant flirting or incautious suggestive remarks of other hungry female staff, but very subtle ambushes and very off handed encounters suggesting avoidance.

She knew she was a stunner to look at being tall and athletic, blond and blue eyed. She allowed Wilfy to be a perfect gentleman. They went ashore together in Sydney. She was a West Coast girl but as she was impressed by the sights and sounds of the metropolis she did not let on. This was her country and she wanted Wilfy to think she was in possession. From then on they were frequent companions on excursions ashore until she was sure he was properly enamoured, as she was beginning to be, and bedded him.

They were compatible. Neither was inexperienced and each knew their own wants and needs and how to satisfy the other. It was obviously a match made in heaven and they were married in Perth in 1975. She gave up her job and moved back with her parents while Wilfy bought a beautiful Oceanside plot in North Freemantle, on a tip-off from her dad, and commissioned the building of a good sized brick house.

This was their shared project and, when on leave, Wilfy enjoyed joining the tradesmen concreting, bricklaying, roofing, plumbing and cabling. He was still climbing the promotion ladder at sea getting the four stripes of Staff Captain while the project was still running. Amanda loved him for the way he dropped all

pretensions of rank as he joined in the work of the artisans, taking courses in plumbing, electrics and carpentry to ensure he pulled his weight with the mob of skilled workers on site. He was becoming a real credible Aussie.

Following a well trodden path, Amanda, who was immensely fit from surfing, swimming and helping on the site, gave birth to two boys in quick succession as the house was reaching completion in early 1976 and 1977. This was the Australian dream and home life soon settled into a routine of barbie parties round the pool or on the beach in front of the house. For the boys it was sport, sport and sunblock even before they were in primary school and then ever after.

Just occasionally, prompted by a repetitive bad dream in which he stuffed a polystyrene manikin down a narrow hatchway on a rusty old ship, he would have qualms about his possible responsibility for the death of Bronnie. He was doing well. He was highly disciplined and conscientious in his job. He had stopped drinking alcohol almost completely, ordering the stewards to bring him pure tonic water whenever he ordered a gin and tonic, and sipping his wine at mealtimes. He honoured Amanda by shrugging off any and all advances made by female passengers and started studying hard for a degree in Maritime History. He still oozed charm and confidence and became the must-sail-with Captain when he got his first command in 1980.

The Sun Galaxy management was convinced that the premiership of Margaret Thatcher in 1979 would usher in a new era of prosperity in England so in 1981 they moved the 'Galaxy

Spectrum' from the Far East back to Southampton for the summer season and kept her there.

Captain William Ferring was their obvious choice for the command. Of course, he helped them to make a grand success of the venture against the more established P&O, whose reputation was tarnished by some very negative articles in Sunday newspapers. Their fares were lower but not uneconomical as their offshore management structure allowed them to make good profits with one, two and finally three ships making a regular rotation. The ships were smaller allowing them to visit smaller harbours and to give the passengers a more intimate experience.

Wilfy was able to fly home on leave for a month after a two month stint. Some would not enjoy this disjointed life but he thrived on it and the family loved to have him back for four or five weeks at a time.

11. INCRIMINATING EVIDENCE.

In 1983 the Chief Inspector of the East London 'Parish' of Plaistow received an email from on high that there were probably too many historical cases which should either be cleared up or abandoned before the police station was abandoned for sale.

"Aha," he thought, "that bloody smart graduate girl."

He dispatched his latest recruit, a keen young female police constable, Yasmin Baker, to rummage through files in the basement to see if any old cases were viable. She came across the several cases where the perpetrator was not found but one case of a homicide where the suspect walked free through lack of sufficient evidence to convince the judge that the case should be concluded.

She had read through the court proceedings and was convinced the witness statements made sense and therefore, this William Ferring was a very plausible perpetrator. He had been represented by an eminent QC and had pleaded not guilty the charges and the case had collapsed because his barrister had cast sufficient doubt for the judge to dismiss the case. Reading deeply into the case she was very puzzled by the connected case of the victim's husband who had been accused of the murder five years earlier but had committed suicide before the case came to trial.

Among the effects, collected all those years ago from the scene, was a knotted used rubber jonnies. It had been in a foil packet and wrapped in a woman's handkerchief in the victim's handbag. The smear taken had been accepted as suitable for

DNA analysis. A pullover found at the scene had been bagged and inventoried but not presented at the trial, possibly because it was not seen as relevant. She had requested to see the actual items and to her surprise found the garment had a Cash's name tape with the defendant's name on it. It had probably been missed by the police in Karachi who would not have been familiar with the practice of marking clothes in this way, thinking it was just a maker's brand label. Very careful examination of this garment, through the plastic bag, revealed the presence of several long blond hairs and apparently two pubic hairs. Without breaking the seal on the bag, Yasmin sent the bagged item to the lab with an explanation of her findings.

As she trawled through the evidence and referred to the present she found that Ferring had become a senior Captain in a very prestigious cruise line company. A man held in high esteem by his management and the passengers, some of whom would only embark on voyages if he were the Captain. It excited her to know she was on the trail of the mighty. She would be able to bring down a, no doubt pompous, senior figure for a crime he had thought he had got away with. She redoubled her efforts but realised she would have to be very smart indeed to avoid the establishment closing ranks to protect a senior and respected member. She was aware of influence which could be applied to the case by, for instance, the Freemasons. She wondered if her boss was one of them, and then if the Captain might be also.

She found out that Captain William Ferring was in charge of the 's.s. Blue Fantasia', a cruise liner regularly calling into Southampton during the summer. The ship specialised in one or

two week cruises to Lisbon, Gibraltar, The Balearics, The South of France, Italy, Greece, The Canaries and a few ports in Northern Africa.

It had been a long shot to see if there was DNA evidence and the Superintendent had not been in favour at first. She delved into their local statistics and pointed out very tactfully that they had not solved a single cold case murder since the Home Office had sent down a memo requesting that old cases should be solved or discarded with the implication that a significant number should be pursued if there were any chance of a resolution or preferably a conviction.

The Chief was fighting a crime wave of warehouse thefts and shootings as the unemployed dockers and their offspring, a tribe not renowned for their high moral standards, struggled to make a living as the world around them was being torn down for redevelopment. He needed a result or two to boost his credibility in the face of the perceived weakness in controlling crime. Any potential success would be welcome.

She asked for a rail warrant to visit Southampton and in conjunction with the local police she arranged to go on board the ship. She told nobody the purpose of the visit just that she would like to go aboard and meet the Captain. Fortunately the British Transport Police had some business with the Captain regarding an assault by a crew member on a passenger so she was able to tag along. They met the Captain in his dayroom cum office adjacent to his sleeping quarters and bathroom. The local sergeant introduced her as a new constable gaining experience

and she asked to use the captain's bathroom taking samples from the hairbrush. She could use these for an initial investigation and, if they proved positive, she could take another sample, after he had been cautioned, to use as evidence for the prosecution.

“Eureka!” Yasmin Baker cried out. Nobody heard her. She was down in the semi basement under the Plaistow Police Station, a red brick Victorian pile half a mile north of the Royal Docks which, at that time, were in the process of being converted into an airport.

Now that the lab result was in she knew that she had discovered the link between William Ferring and the body found in the ship ‘Putra’. She was entering into the next phase of her investigation.

Yasmin actually loved the detective work she was doing in the underground labyrinth. She knew very well why she had been consigned to the ‘dungeon’ as the predominantly white male cockney action-men called her place of work. As a woman of mixed race and, what was even worse a fast-tracked sociology graduate, she assumed this would be her place for years to come. Always a high achiever, she was determined to solve this awful mystery of the girl in the void space, and she would not mind at all if she had to do it single handed. She had read up on carbon dioxide poisoning and found out that it could be one of the most frightening and drawn out processes causing a state of fear and panic, excessive heart rate and heart attack while carbon monoxide, on the other hand, sends a victim to sleep peacefully before snuffing out life. She was not yet hardened to the horrors

of real life policing in the gang ridden old docklands in the East End of London, so in the quiet of the night in her bed she had suffered for this girl who died when not much older than herself.

She knew there were some very high hurdles to jump so she set-to to piece together the narrative which would put the real perpetrator in the dock and off to prison. Unwisely, she had decided Ferring must be the guilty one before she had all the evidence collated but she knew the hard work started when a hunch had to be backed up by an unassailable set of hard facts.

It interested her that Ferring had been a suspect and indeed had been charged and tried for the murder of the girl she knew as Bronwyn Watkins ne Price, but that due to lack of an evidential connection to the body the case had been dismissed by the judge before the jury brought a verdict.

One of her minor courses had been criminology and she had thrilled with the knowledge about DNA analysis superceding fingerprinting as a method of putting a suspect at the scene. The technique was gaining traction and credibility. The police and judges had been educated on the possibilities and some landmark convictions for theft and burglary and 3 homicides had been secured using DNA evidence.

She was not daunted but it meant that she had to be all the more vigilant in her construction of the case. She knew the defence would invoke the principal of "Double Jeopardy" but this case had not actually been tried but dismissed. The judge had been wise enough to realise that the prosecution might be able to secure a conviction if it gathered together sufficient evidence not

available at the time of the trial. Was he prescient of progress in the analysis of DNA?

She managed to convince the constabulary that this may be the first time the force would be able to use the new technique of DNA identification to reopen the case. She did all the research to find out where Wilfy would be. She had taken a DNA sample. She found that there was a match to the semen found in the used rubber jonnies. In consultation with the leader of the Rape Investigation Group they concluded that the technique was helping them in many open 'cold' cases and that the submission of DNA evidence in this case should be encouraged.

Finally, were there sufficient grounds for the arrest of this man? The Chief Constable consulted a retained lawyer and the meeting resulted in a positive response. The warrant was issued and Captain Ferring was cautioned in his quarters two hours before the scheduled departure of his ship. His place was taken by a relief captain brought back from leave and Ferring left the ship accompanied by a senior police officer, apparently to casual observers, on normal business.

12. THE FINAL TRIAL WILFY GOES DOWN

His father was fond of pontificating in the bar of the Hare and Hounds: "The solicitor we've got in London; he's the best there is for criminal cases. He'll get a silk, bloody expensive. What else can I do? Don't you worry I'll get all the money back when he's let go. A crazy accusation like this can't possibly stick. Such a bloody waste of police and everyone else's time. It's bloody obvious, the queer husband did it. Why commit harry bloody kirry? They want to try him again. Double jeopardy I call it. The case should be closed, dead."

The solicitor was a little wiser and more sanguine. Having heard all the evidence he was not quite so optimistic when talking to Wilfy.

"You know, if this DNA evidence on the rubber jonnies in the handkerchief stands up and is accepted as yours and hers together, you will have to admit in court that you had an intimate relationship. I'm afraid after that you won't have much chance. And then there's the pullover, missed in the first investigation. Furthermore the judge will see that you lied in the first trial allowing Watkins to be assumed guilty. His suicide, which, at that time, seemed to exonerate you will be held against you. I am afraid that your course must be exactly the opposite from the first trial. You will have to own up to everything eventually, speak clearly and be absolutely honest. Your barrister will have two weapons only: your lack of intention, which he will force you to emphasize and the probability that you actually asked your colleague to free the victim from the compartment. They are, of

course interdependent. If the prosecution manages to establish that you intended to kill her then your story about freeing her will be dismissed as a cover story. The prosecution will press this point to go for the murder conviction. We may hope for manslaughter but I can't see how we could manage an acquittal. We may be able to get Jones into the witness box but he probably won't be a very strong witness after all these years."

The prosecution managed to get Chief Inspector Ayub Khan, but still Wilfy's barrister wanted him to prevaricate.

"I recommend you plead not guilty to both charges but be ready to change your plea to guilty of manslaughter only if the judge and jury are inclined to believe the DNA evidence. You may leave your decision as to when, tactically, to change the plea to me. You realise that my job then will switch from saying you had no involvement to demonstrate that you had no intent to kill Bronwyn."

The trial commenced on the 3rd of November 1988 without incident. Wilfy was represented by a Q.C., Mr Theobald Curtis. There was a Q.C. for the prosecution.

Wilfy pleaded not guilty to murder and not guilty to manslaughter. It was up to the prosecution barrister, Mr. Douglas Furlow to open the case for the prosecution:

“This is a most distressing case where lust and self interest have led to the murder of a young woman in her prime. A young woman recently married to a man who can be shown to be a dutiful and considerate husband. The prosecution will show that her husband was cuckolded by the accused who sought to hide his caddish behaviour by disposing of the woman who would have been able, at any time, to bear witness to his heinous carnal activities. He had committed the most disloyal and hateful crime against a marriage; that of continual and persistent acts of adultery. We will show that the accused seduced this young woman away from her husband while he was, by nature of his duty to the ship, unable to detect any clue of their disloyalty and that the accused satisfied his lust and at the same time scored evil advantage over his mentor who treated him as a friend and colleague.

“The prosecution will establish that there was intent in this homicide and the method of its execution and disposal was contrived by an active and educated mind knowing that there would most likely be a prolonged period in which the body would lie undiscovered.

“The prosecution will show that the evidence it will bring, due to advances in the science of DNA matching, will prove beyond doubt that the accused, brought to trial and acquitted due to lack of evidence in 1972, lied under oath when he denied the adultery, lied under oath when he denied the final act of carnality and lied under oath when he denied being in the space known as the CO2 locker or store in which the body was found.

“The evidence we shall bring was collected painstakingly from the ship “Putra” when the suspicious death was reported shortly before the ship was broken up for scrap. We owe it to two alert labourers in Karachi and to the diligence of police both in Karachi and here that this material evidence will stand up to scientific scrutiny.

“To shorten the time for this retrial His Lordship has ruled that the transcripts of the previous trial of William Ferring will be brought into the proceedings in their entirety. All and any evidence and statements given there will be examined in this trial. New evidence will be shown to contradict statements made in the defence of the accused. Since the previous trial in 1972 certain materials, taken from the scene, have been subjected to higher levels of forensic scrutiny, namely DNA analysis, and conclusions have been drawn which cast extreme doubt on the testimony of the accused. It is clear that the abandonment of the trial would not have occurred had the evidence now available had been brought to court at the time.

“With your lordship’s permission the prosecution will present a summary of the first trial which has been accepted as true and unbiased by the defence. My learned friend Mr. Daniels will read it to the court.”

The Q.C. bowed to the judge and left the court while his junior barrister spread a file on the desk before him.

“My lord and ladies and gentlemen of the jury this trial is the second concerning the disappearance of Mrs. Bronwyn

Watkins which took place on or about the Sunday 6th July 1967 and was abandoned.

“The prime suspect at that time was the deceased's husband, Oliver Watkins. However before he was brought to trial for this matter, he faced charges for gross indecency alleged to have taken place on the same evening and night with another man in a hotel in the Stockwell area. The police case against the two men was heard in Camberwell Green Magistrates Court and dismissed due to lack of corroborative evidence. Shortly afterward Watkins was arrested and charged with the murder of Bronwyn, his wife. The body of a young woman found in the Royal Victoria Dock was assumed to be of the missing Bronwyn Watkins. He was remanded in custody in Brixton Prison and released a week later on bail pending further enquiries. The body was identified as to be that of another young woman. Soon after Watkins's release his lifeless body was found in the Thames by Vauxhall Bridge and witnesses on a passing bus stated that they saw him jump or dive into the shallow water below. The coroner found that Oliver Watkins took his own life while the balance of his mind was disturbed.

“The trial for murder was abandoned. There were no other suspects and the body of the missing woman was not found. The case was downgraded to the missing persons file.

“Five years later evidence was put forward by two labourers in Karachi leading to the discovery of Mrs Watkins's body in a space known as the CO2 locker where cylinders of the gaseous fire extinguishant, carbon dioxide, were stored on board the

vessel “Putra”. Testimony from a steward was used to establish a case against the presently accused who was alleged to have been seen in and around the locker with the victim on the docking day in London on the 6th July 1967.

“The witness, Francisco Valera, stated that he saw the victim with the accused as he was passing on an errand for the captain. The witness statement was brought into doubt because of a possible tit for tat vendetta with the accused. The accused denied any association with the victim and the prosecution failed due to lack of hard or corroborative evidence.

“The prosecution in this trial is now able to bring evidence in the form of DNA identification which shows the accused’s earlier statements to be untrue and supports the testimony of the steward, Francisco Valera.

“The jury will be issued with a full transcript of the previous trial. Anything said at that hearing by any witness or the accused may be taken into consideration in arriving at the verdict in this trial.

“With your permission, my lord, the clerk will distribute the transcripts”

“Yes, of course.” said Judge Roger Mortlake and he continued:

“The jury will go directly to the hotel assigned and may use the time to familiarise themselves with the transcript. Please remember you are not to discuss the matters of this trial or

anything relating to it with each other or anyone else until you have heard all the evidence and are required to reach the verdict when you may deliberate among yourselves only.

“If you have any questions regarding the previous trial you will kindly write them down and, in the morning, the clerk will assess them and if necessary put them before me. Any answers I shall give shall be addressed to the court and the jury.” He then banged his gavel on the table and announced:

“The court is adjourned until ten o'clock tomorrow morning.”

“All rise,” said an usher and the judge slid out by the door behind the bench from whence he had arrived some seventy minutes earlier.

At ten the following morning the judge cleared the public and press benches and opened proceedings by asking each member of the jury individually if they had read and understood the transcript of the previous trial and whether they had submitted any questions to the clerk. The judge answered the following written questions:

Question: “Does the law of double jeopardy apply here: the accused was acquitted in the first trial, how can he be tried again?”

Answer: “The defendant was not found to be ‘not guilty’ by the jury as the trial was curtailed therefore his guilt or innocence is still in question.”

Question: "Why did the judge in the first trial dismiss the case after witnesses had been heard but no verdict had been given?"

Answer: "The judge's ruling was based on the fact that the witnesses had been all been brought by the prosecution and their evidence was circumstantial. The defence had no proof of innocence such as an alibi and was therefore at a disadvantage. He assessed that a jury could possibly bring a guilty verdict based on insubstantial evidence and the verdict would be unsafe."

Question: "Can the witnesses be cross examined in this trial?"

Answer: "Unfortunately not all, and it is my judgement that the transcript contains the cross examinations at the time and that should be sufficient. Police Inspector Aiyub Faisal Khan, now Deputy Superintendent of Police, is being brought by the prosecution and any evidence he may give may be subject to cross examination by the defence. Please note that forensic evidence which will be presented to you today and tomorrow may be seen to support the statements, made by the witnesses. The Superintendent may be questioned about the statements and the previous trial."

He then continued, "I have some more questions in front of me: I cannot answer any questions involving the substance of the witness statements. You must take them at face value and decide on their value in bringing verdict."

“On the facts surrounding the incident in Karachi: The cargo ship ‘Putra’ was alongside in the harbour of Karachi unloading cargo when labourers suspected a dead body in the CO2 locker on the boat deck of the ship. They, in turn, informed the then Inspector in his office in the harbour. Mr Ferring came up to the police station on another matter and was accused of the crime by a steward whom he had himself accused of theft but later exonerated. Scotland Yard was called and they decided to send Detective Inspector Monroe to investigate.

“Both Detective Inspector Monroe and Deputy Superintendent Khan will be called by the prosecution and may be cross examined by the defence barrister.”

Superintendent Ayub Khan was sworn in and made a long statement which was entirely the same as the transcript before the jurors. Wilfy’s barrister in cross examination asked:

“Superintendent, what makes you sure that the statement from the Steward, Francisco Valera was not a complete fabrication designed to deflect attention from his own situation and incriminate his accuser?”

“Firstly, my lord, he made his statement freely and very clearly and typed it out without any pressure from any one. Secondly, my lord, the statement appears to be borne out by evidence.”

In his summing- up the judge made it clear that premeditation was required for a murder conviction but culpable negligence including the placing a victim in danger’s way was

sufficient for a manslaughter conviction and made it mandatory if it lead to death.

The clerk was leading the jury in to their places. He knew he had to face the verdict soon. He would be told to stand up. The foreman or leader of the jury would be directed to stand and deliver the jury's decision. He felt as if his gut was being twisted like a Spanish windlass. He couldn't shit himself because he hadn't eaten for three days and his gut was so screwed up he knew nothing could pass through. He was already in extreme pain. When the verdict came, if it were 'guilty', he was sure he would self destruct. In his seagoing career he had faced severe storms one serious collision and grounding on a rocky coast. Never had he felt such fear as he felt now. In those situations there had always been a practical solution, a way out and an opportunity to use his skills and instincts to save himself and others but in those cases he had not been to blame. Waiting for the order to stand up and be judged was the worst thing ever. His only previous experience in court was to give evidence and in both cases his evidence had been trivial and circumstantial.

He had been called back to the court at ten o'clock because they said the jury was ready with the verdict. It was now two o'clock in the afternoon and he had no idea what the delay had been. He had been up and down to the cells three times and the jury had not appeared. This time the jury was actually being filed in.

Over the last few days he had been trying to work out how he had managed to be so careless all that time ago, whether he

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should feel guilty or was it somebody else's negligence which had caused the death of the girl whom he could not even remember precisely in spite of being her lover for a year and several months. This was futile as was his other train of thought which reflected on his life in between.

Much can happen in five years. He had married a year after that fatal voyage and now had two children and a wife to support. He had progressed in his career and lived in a heavily mortgaged house in Perth W.A.

Until his arrest in Southampton he had seen himself as settled and happy with his lot. He had served in a variety of ships in the Foster Timms Steamship Company and was now an established cruise ship captain.

This wretched business, dragging up his rather reckless past was an interruption. They might put him away and who would provide for his wife and the kids. Pragmatically it was ridiculous. These thoughts made him angry.

"All stand," ordered the clerk. The judge entered from behind the bench and sat down. "You may be seated," said the clerk.

"The defendant will stand." Wilfy stood, clenching his buttocks with all his muscular might.

The judge observed the court, "The leader of the jury," he said and a middle aged female in a tweed outfit stood up.

“Have the members of the jury arrived at unanimous verdict on the two charges brought against the accused?”

“We have, my lord.”

“On the first charge of the murder of Miss Bronwyn Price on or about 6th July 1967 on board the vessel “Putra” in King George the Fifth dock in London.”

“We find the defendant guilty.”

“On the second charge of the manslaughter due to gross negligence of Miss Bronwyn Price on or about the 6th of July 1967 on board the vessel “Putra” in dock in London.”

“We find the defendant guilty as charged.”

Wilfy slumped onto the p.v.c. cushion in the dock shaking visibly. The court had taken on a strange silence.

The judge looked around the room to gain attention: “The court thanks the jury for the diligence of its deliberations and the wisdom of the verdict. Thank you for giving up your time for this most valuable civic duty. You are dismissed and I will recommend that you are not called again for jury service in your lifetime.”

The jury filed out silently. They carried their responsibility like a burden. They knew they had sanctioned that this man could be incarcerated for a considerable time for murder.

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“Sentencing will be announced tomorrow at ten a.m. at which time I will make a statement,” announced the judge as he collected some papers together and nodded at the clerk.

“All rise.”

Wilfy was sentenced to life imprisonment for the crime of murder and fifteen years for manslaughter to run concurrently.

Wilfy's father turned to the solicitor sitting next to him in the public gallery and told him to immediately appeal the murder conviction and look at the possibility of doing the same for manslaughter.

In the appeal, a month later, the Q.C. established that there was no premeditation and no motive and the murder verdict was overturned but the sentence was still harsh as the judges took a dim view of Wilfy's adultery and his 'not guilty' pleas and denials in the previous trials.

Commander William Ferring R.N. died soon afterward bankrupted by the Inland Revenue with debts caused by his support for Wilfy.

POST SCRIPT

As each part of this story came together I kept Lilly in the picture and explained to her how I was dramatising the tale from the bare facts either found in the prisoner's papers or which I had uncovered by my researches. She was satisfied with my work but lost interest in it as she said it did not seem to be about her but mostly just the tale of this Captain Wilfy Ferring. She did not want to have it published as it would do nothing to benefit her image

I had gone to Wales and found that the Prices of Cardiff were ignorant of the existence of Bronwyn and her fate and the councillor, Morgan, was nothing but a name on a plaque in the old town hall and a few lines in the local rag. He had died without further note.

I cannot complain as I was paid well by her agent. Any expectation of royalties disappeared as the facts of the story unfolded and it became obvious it would not be published.

So it remained on my file until I heard of her tragic death in a car accident, when she was on tour in, of all places, Wales.

I tried to contact Captain Ferring but the School of Navigation said he had died in 2016 in hospital.

Rob.

THE SECOND OFFICERS'S WIFE AND OTHER STORIES

THE SECOND OFFICERS'S WIFE AND OTHER STORIES

SMUGGLERS AND PIRATES

The *Fenix* had come across Dan in the late afternoon of the fourth day after they had heard shots and seen, from a distance, a battle between two fishing dhows and, apparently, a coastal patrol boat. Not wanting to be involved Captain Chuck had ordered “stop engines”. They watched as the two echoes from the dhows disappeared but two more appeared to be moving off to the Northeast. The patrol vessel headed west. They were surprised by the encounter but aware of the risk of pirates. They made way north again and passed through debris left by the encounter. Joe Krels noticed the head of a man bobbing in the waves and saw he was clinging to a large block of polystyrene. His immediate reaction was to draw a bead on the man. “Bleddy pirate” he mouthed under his breath. Fortunately Donny took the binoculars from his eyes in time to push Joe’s rifle high in the air.

‘You bloodthirsty bastard. Why kill him?’ he yelled at Joe.

‘Bleddy pirates is why.’

At that moment came the faint sound of the man yelling, ‘Don’t shoot. Help me, please sir.’

‘Might not be a pirate anyway, could be a victim, a hostage. Who knows? Sometimes you behave like a maniac, Joe.’

Joe looked mildly contrite as he put the safety catch on the sniper rifle.

Donny, the mate, went down to the deck as Chuck manoeuvred the vessel neatly alongside the survivor.

Dan was very frightened. Things had happened too fast for him. It had started three days ago when his friend and mentor, Murak, had decided it was time for him to get involved with the serious business of the village. This Murak had befriended him and in four years had taught him the skills of a sneak-thief and pick-pocket. Murak had fenced the takings in exchange for bed and board.

As he grew up Dan began to realise he was becoming a slave to his mentor so ten days ago he had turned on Murak like a wild animal. In the confines of their small concrete room sitting on the string bed he accused Murak of exploiting him and stealing his takings and teaching him bad non-Islamic behaviour, risking him getting his hands cut off by the mulla. For a week Murak had ignored Dan who had felt punished for his rebellion. When Dan was at his most morose and confused, Murak had returned and recruited him to be a boat-boy. Dan was thrilled to be considered a man worthy of the company of the brigands, and to be back in favour with his friend.

Life on the pirates' long white yacht had been boisterous and exciting. Although he was treated as a servant to fetch and carry things by the older men they were not unkind and offered him qat and tasty snacks as they lay around on the dirty white leather sofas or lounged on sunbeds nursing their

AK47 rifles. He was introduced to the captain, a great presence. All the fighters showed this bearded, beturbaned giant infinite respect and called him Sidi Mohamet obeying his every command.

There was excitement in the air the following morning as breakfast of oily, eggy rice with garlic was distributed all round: the best food Dan had eaten for a long time. The vessel was motoring slowly, rolling to the white capped waves and occasionally taking spray over the starboard bow.

A fighter came over and said: 'I am Habib and you have been given to me as boat-boy. I am going to teach you about the weapons.'

Dan struggled to concentrate as the man explained the parts of the Kalashnikov and how to change the magazine. He had then been shown the rockets in their polystyrene packing and how to pass them up to the men with the launchers, and to use the VHF handset.

Sidi Mohamet gave the order and the fighters, using the deck cranes, launched two small dhows and two rubber-sided rigid inflatables with two engines each: 'Honda 120' he read on the side and 'Suzuki' on another. The dhows, one of which was Dan's assignment, raised their lateen sails as soon as they were free of the yacht's side although they had inboard engines as well.

Dan had caught the gist of the plan. They were going to take a great tanker bound from the Arabian Gulf to South America.

It was going to be easy. They would overcome the crew and hold them as hostages and take the ship for ransom. The talk among the men was of a million barrels of oil at a hundred dollars a barrel.

The fighters in his dhow were well armed but not likely to see action. The dhows were for the raiders in the rigid inflatables to hide behind until the crucial moment when they would attack. The white yacht moved away.

Dan had been unable to fit the magazine on the AK47 due to extreme seasickness. The two fighters began to ignore him as his uselessness became obvious giving him a plastic scoop to bail out the water in the bottom of the boat.

Debilitated by his sickness and anxious to keep the boat dry, he was surprised when the shooting started, some time after the RIBs had sped off northward. The fighters suddenly opened fire with Kalashnikovs at a grey launch as they cursed and swore that the launch was from a rival clan. A large explosion blew off the front of the dhow and one of the fighters fell against him in death, shielding Dan from the explosion and machine gun fire. The water rushed in. The boat and the men, burdened with ammunition, spare guns and machetes sank quickly and he was left clinging to the polystyrene packing from the four rockets. He was only instinctively remaining alive by a thin thread of vitality. Oblivious of passing time it was when he sensed a gun pointing at him from the deck of the rusty orange ship that he

became fully conscious again. In panic he yelled in English at the white man behind the gun.

Dan's earliest memory was of the scalding sand beneath his feet and the painful tug of his mother's hand on his wrist. He remembered how his feet were cut to pieces on the cruel and stony road from the desert interior to the coast but he could not cry out because he saw his mother's were worse than his.

Now, here he was on this hot steel surface being tossed around and occasionally splashed with salty water. He had not been killed because he had been protected by the dead bodies of the fighters, the polystyrene packing and his yelling in English.

An enormous crewman splashed Dan's face from a plastic bottle of water and then proffered it to him. 'Here, drink.' he said in a deep bass voice.

'We shoot pirates.' Donny stated blandly. 'You look hungry.'

'Yes, sir, very hungry. Been in boat too long. Very sick. All food gone into sea. Wommit'

The big man grabbed him under the arms and, taking most of his weight walked him up the deck between rows of drums. 'Here he is Captain,' he said and turning back to Dan, 'what's your name, pirate?' he asked, not entirely unkindly.

He answered.

'Where are you from?'

'Ogadan, Sir.'

'What tribe are you?'

There was silence and suddenly the small emaciated youth under interrogation burst into deep sobs. 'Every man has a tribe but not us anymore. All gone back into the ground. All broken bodies.'

Donny was deeply affected. But he controlled himself.

Captain Chuck continued: 'Why are you a pirate? You sons o'bitches are killing people all over the ocean. The sea ain't safe n'more. We should hand you to the authorities.'

'Or shoot you or toss you over the side,' added Donny with a wry smile. 'He speaks English, wonder why?' he said turning toward Chuck.

'My very good friend Mister Richard: He was a U.S. Aid but he is gone back to America. He gave us water and food for many years and he taught us English because he could not speak our language.

'I am not a real pirate. I was very obliged by these people and they brought me along forcefully. I was to bail out the sea from the boat and give ammunition to them. I have become a very bad sailor and very frightened and nearly dying in the sea. I thank God for you take me out of the sea. I must repay you, for that is the way of the world. Pay by work or pain.'

‘OK, Dan, I can use you,’ said Chuck. ‘You speak good English. You can help us with this situation ahead.’

So Dan joined the crew of the *Fenix* as an interpreter and mediator.

Chuck had witnessed the departure of the fast boats to the northeast.

‘They are going after a big ship,’ Dan informed his new master.

Chuck picked up the phone and called Steve, the Chief engineer. ‘Can you come up and talk?’

Steve was preceded by a stink of green tobacco smoke.

‘Steve, I think we’re about to witness a hijack. I want you to be ready. Look at this radar picture. The one in the middle is the real mischief and these small echoes moving eastward are the fighters. They are shaping up for a situation with a tanker, my new friend tells me. It’s a turkey shoot but they may come after us afterwards.’

Steve grunted and then rejoined: ‘I can adjust the governors but we’ll only get an extra knot, maybe up to thirteen.’

‘Could be enough for what we need.’ and turning to Joe Krels, ‘what have you got up your sleeve, Joe?’

The squat blond man answered in his broad South African accent, ‘two armour piercing anti-tank rocket launchers and

six rockets, two high velocity automatic rifles and some of the old AK47s.'

'Rig the rockets facing forward on the port side ready to shoot at a vessel ahead of us. Right, Joe?' A plan of defence and attack was forming in Chuck's mind.

Donny, who was watching the radar, suddenly gasped, 'Oh man, look at this, they've all increased speed to close in on the tanker. The bigger echo is hanging back to the west.'

'OK, looks like we have us a situation,' said Chuck following the direction of Donny's finger'

He put the binoculars to his eyes and just picked out the white hull of the larger echo. The light was fading but the vessel had no navigation lights showing

On the *Fenix* they had a ringside view of the scene unfolding. Chuck was mentally plotting their progress and Dan's prediction was confirmed. The two smaller echos increased speed to around 25 knots and made for the stern of the tanker. The white mother ship, still visible in the greying light turned and headed to parallel the course of the tanker. As the boats approached there was a small explosion on the superstructure of the tanker just below the bridge followed swiftly by rapid fire from the boats. He did not understand why the tanker did not take evasive action until suddenly the scenario changed.

'Here, Dan, you get to work on the VHF. Can you use this thing? Find the channel they're on. Can you listen in and understand?' Chuck handed him a walky talky.

'Yes, Sir. I know this thing. I look for channel.'

The tanker was shooting back. First one and then the second boat exploded and they immediately disappeared in plumes of flame and spray. *Fenix* was getting nearer to the scene and would be apparent to the white vessel.

'What's happening, Dan?' demanded Chuck as he heard jabbering on the radio in Dan's hand.

'Panicking, sir. All very frightened. Boats sinking, too many men killed by guards on big ship. Captain Sidi Mohamet is telling to go on board. The other man is in water, sir. He is telling that his talky-walky will stop soon as it is getting wet. Other man is screaming he is paining from wounds. Part of rubber boat is floating. Two men drowning. Other boat's disappearing, gone, gone down, sir.'

Dan listened to the panicking chat on the radio until a clear voice drowned out the others. 'This voice is Captain Sidi Mohamet, sir. He is telling crew on board that they must come and attack ship to the south so not report them so they will be chased by navy. Then he says they cannot go home to boss without any ships for ransom.'

"'Ship to south" is us, I guess. We're next on their list. See him turning to starboard. We have superior weapons; we

hope. Let's hope he doesn't have a whole lot more rocket gear.'

The white vessel had turned and a quick look at the radar told Chuck it was creating a collision situation.

'OK Joe, move your ass. Have you got your boys together? We will have to fight that godamn white vessel, looks like an old super yacht. We cannot outrun him.

'Get the rockets set up to fire over the port bow now. He thinks I'll chicken out to starboard at the last minute so he can broadside us and send a boarding party over the rail.'

'This old Gulf supply boat is very strong in the bow.' he voiced quietly to himself, 'in a head-to-head we can sink any fancy fibreglass or aluminum yacht.'

The tanker was coming nearer. *Fenix* was half a mile on his starboard beam and the deck lights were showing above the powerful anti piracy lights. They could just make out black-uniformed security guards aiming various weapons directly at them. Suddenly there was a dazzling beam of light; a very powerful searchlight was homing in on them. 'Right Donny get on channel 16 and call them up. His name is "Seaking Choo 88" from the Automatic Identification System. Tell him we are friendly just that, no more chat...and Donny switch our AIS back on'

The searchlight was extinguished and the tanker steamed onward as if unaffected as the deep rumble of the engines grew fainter.

The white pirate mother ship was closing on the port side, coming for them. Chuck decided he would wait until collision was inevitable.

He picked up the handset 'Joe, when I make one short blast on the horn put two rockets through the wheelhouse under the windows.'

Chuck moved over to the wheel, disengaged the autopilot and after half a minute of deliberation swung the wheel hard to port giving one short blast on the whistle. The twin rudders bit into the sea and the ship heeled slightly to starboard. The two vessels were now converging at around twenty-five knots with the *Fenix* pointing just ahead of the white vessel and swinging to port as the distance between them closed. Joe's men launched the two rockets with a sudden whooshing exactly on cue and they spiralled towards the white ship's superstructure. Fire was returned from their bridge but it was soon silenced as the rockets crunched into the structure and exploded. It was a very large super yacht, probably hijacked from some hapless oil-rich sheik out for a cruise with his wives, sons and daughters.

Chuck saw Joe's men launched the last two missiles into the side of the damaged white vessel at the waterline. 'Hold on everyone,' he shouted as the two vessels came together. The

dirty white hull folded with a horrible tearing sound of rupturing material as the bluff steel bow drove through.

Chuck pulled back the control levers to full astern until *Fenix* began to free herself from the stricken mother ship and they saw the greasy teak deck of the super yacht as it rolled over towards them and then with a ghastly gurgling and spurts of water it disappeared beneath the waves.

Debris surfaced and then two life rafts burst up through the surface and self inflated with a loud farting noise. There were no survivors. The pirates sank without trace dragged under by the weight of their weapons, hand grenades and magazines of ammunition.

As the *Fenix* turned toward the east the stern lights of the tanker could be seen faintly as it made way to the southern horizon.

‘Donny, switch off the AIS. I don’t want that tanker making a report. With any luck they ain’t written nuthen down yet and we don’t want anyone poking around in our coltan minerals business.’

A slick of oil grew on the sea surface and a white leather-covered sunbathing mattress nudged against the side of the *Fenix*.

Chuck told Donny to set a course eastward and turned, almost tripping over Dan who was cowering on the deck of the wheelhouse.

‘What the...’

‘Please, Sir, I am very sad,’ and Chuck could see he had been weeping profoundly. ‘Those were my new people. You killed them all including my special friends. Now gone like my tribal people all gone into the ocean. I don’t think I belong in the world any more. I have no-one I am just like an animal.’

Chuck was deflated. His victory, against the odds, over a crew of black-hearted pirates, suddenly assumed the mantle of the murder of a group of fellow humans. He did not know this young guy but he had recruited him and recognised him as one of his team, his crew and family on board. In the aftermath of the action with the adrenalin drained from his body he simply felt profoundly sad. All he could say was: ‘Thanks, Dan, you done good.’

He went below and fortified by a large slug of Jack Daniels, snatched from his cabin on passing, he went forward to inspect the damage.

THE SECOND OFFICERS'S WIFE AND OTHER STORIES

THE SECOND OFFICERS'S WIFE AND OTHER STORIES

THE DIRECTOR OF STUDIES' FOIBLES.

The director's study is a nasty modern room of 1960's brutalist concrete and bare brickwork, an unsightly adjunct to the medieval architecture of the main edifice. The overwhelming first impression is of the smell of tobacco. The absent occupant is a heavy smoker; a pipe smoker judging by the rack of dissimilar pipes and the bundle of white pipe cleaners in the corner of the cluttered desk. The dominant colour is brownish yellow apparent in the thin curtains and the once-white paintwork of the Crittall steel window frame.

The man is an academic. The books are of all mismatched shapes and sizes, some on the inadequate bookcase but most in piles on the floor, others perched on the ugly oak desk. The typewriter has been consigned to the floor next to the heavy elm captain's chair. There is a small scrap of carpet under it reaching into the knee-hole of the desk. On a shelf under the small mirror on the wall opposite the door is a Remington razor; a small dust-pile of desiccated whiskers beneath. But the focus quickening the heart rate of the boys making their elicit visit, is the stack of polished, slightly curved bamboo canes in the far corner.

Their purpose is to find the O level papers. They know the type of envelope containing them and they have meticulously planned to open it, photograph the papers and

reseal the envelope so their visit would be undetected. Their quest was commercial; they are already contracted to a hopeful bunch of ready cheats.

If Johnson's dad had not given him the digital spy camera for his birthday they would not have hatched the plot.

Johnson goes in while his co-conspirator keeps guard near the door. He would willingly abandon the original plan to destroy all the hated canes in the corner instead.

"Try the second drawer," whispers Jacob.

"It's locked."

"Look, keys hanging on that hook next to the mirror."

Johnson opens the drawers with a key. There is nothing of interest in the top or second drawer just the usual detritus, paper clips, bulldog clips, various scruffy bits of forgotten homework, a stapler, ball point pens, pencils, erasers and so on. But on opening the bottom drawer Johnson smiles broadly, holding up a half bottle of Gordon's gin.

"Look! This is what he sneaks out for halfway through lessons."

They each take a swig, choking on the unfamiliar spirit.

Johnson sees an envelope below where the bottle had been lying. It is of a similar type to the exam board's. He tips out the contents and gasps.

"Look at this. It's full of pictures of naked boys in the showers!"

"Shit," exclaims Jacob. "Come on, Borrry. Damn the papers. Let's go."

"No! No! No! We've hit gold here. Never mind the gin. These pictures are worth a mint."

"You mean money? Pater always keeps me short of the old spondulix."

"No! No! No! Influence, leverage. Money would be too dangerous, but it might be nice to be House Captain, what? Or get all sorts of prestigious prizes and avoid all those irritating summary punishments. Here, let's take some photos. We'll take a shot of the pictures spilling out of the envelope with none of the rude bits showing to indicate what we know, then we take copies of the most lewd ones. Blimey, look at this; absolutely perverted!" says Boris, tilting a picture towards Jacob.

"Ghastly," says Jacob, eyes popping out of his head.

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“Now we see if we can find the exam papers but I think the dirty old bugger has hidden them somewhere else like under his pillow.”

“Look at the bloody time,” whispers Jacob.

“O.K.” replies Johnson, “five minutes and we’re gone.”

CHANGELINGS

THE GRADUATION PARTY

Duncan was beaming and all those around, fuelled by an excellent champagne, were singing his praises. Frank, his father, was smiling so hard his face was beginning to ache as he kissed the women some on the cheek some on the lips and shook the hands of the men. They were mostly family, brothers and sister and his wife's parents and other in-laws and nephews, nieces, boyfriends, girlfriends and school friends. It was a very happy family occasion and everyone knew it was especially happy for him.

Duncan had surprised them all, which was probably a bit unfair because there was never any doubt about his intelligence, just his application.

He had not always shone at school.

Frank ushered them from the drawing room into the dining room as his wife, Sheila, had announced the meal. Frank loved this sort of party. He sat at the top of the table with all around him. The warmth of these family dos was a tonic to his ego and succour to his well being. The table was enormous for the size of the modest suburban house and the most significant purchase of their marriage. The children, when younger, had acted out plays on the top of it and made houses underneath. Sheila had made dresses on it and even a three-piece suit back in the seventies when flared

trousers were the fashion and during all this time they had eaten innumerable Sunday meals, given dinner parties and 20 Christmas dinners had been untidily consumed on it.

The conversation was lively and his younger son, Jerry, was joining in with great enjoyment as the successful brother was being torn down a peg or two with stories of all the failures and stupidities of his childhood.

And then the inevitable 'And who does he get it from?' from Sheila, who turning to her husband smiled that very deep and satisfied smile of a woman who confidently knows her husband deeply loves her even after she has gained twenty five years and nearly as many pounds.

There was a pause, one of those pauses where somebody should have said 'It must be either twenty past or twenty to.' But no one did. Instead Susan Colefield who was the recent live-in of Frank's brother Jason, said wistfully "Who is Jerry like ? He's not like his father or his mother they're both much too fair and he's so dark."

This did not break the silence but rather deepened it.

"He's a changeling." said a mischievous twelve-year-old girl-cousin sniggering. Then the conversations started up again and the laughter came back, but Jerry did not join in for a few minutes. He looked to be deep in thought and then suddenly as if he had been switched on again he smiled broadly and was chatting away as if nothing had happened.

Frank had also noted Susan's remark and the retort of the girl cousin, such a thoughtless little nymph he thought. Why were people like Susan so insensitive? And he had also noted Jerry's discomfort. It had cut him a little and he wondered why and as he did he remembered the words of a particularly nasty pink-skinned woman who had been drinking with them in the evening on one family holiday; the mother of some friends the boys had made at the swimming pool. "He's so dark he's like an Indian." He had not felt any hurt at the time, not for himself nor for his son whose olive skin was fine in contrast to all the pinks and reds of the majority of the English and Europeans. Racism had never been an issue with him until later he had realised that she'd meant to be subtly insulting. But then he felt himself reddening, as he sensed after all these years that Jerry might have felt the slight. He remembered too, in horror, how one morning long ago when he and Sheila were in bed they had been talking about how lucky they were to have such beautiful children. He'd said "but Jerry is so dark, his eyes so black and full of expression" and how, at that moment, the door had eased open and those self same big brown eyes had stared at him and smiled that shy, appealing smile of his before he had bounded across the floor and on to the bed to hug them both and demand their attention while he related the previous day's events at school, at the swimming pool, on the bus, at supper and how his hero Tim-the-Tearaway had saved his dog from being run over.

"Yes," he thought "perhaps Jerry had been sensitised."

He was travelling salesman at the time and he had been away in the middle of each week and his wife had been a staff

nurse at the County Hospital. They had been fine times they had good friends enough money for a small car and a heavy mortgage which disappeared surprisingly fast in those years of high inflation. Dominic Gupta, always full of jokes, was a big favourite of Sheila's. In fact he remembered he had even once associated Jerry's darkness with Gupta but had easily rejected the idea of any mischief as ridiculous.

On the day of Jerry's birth it had been a beautiful bright day. Sheila's mother had been insufferably trying to organise everything as if everyone else in the world was incompetent. But Frank had managed to keep cool because, despite lack of sleep, he was so happy at the successful birth of their son. He was a beautiful baby, so said everyone who came into contact with them. "Such deep and fine set eyes, such a lot of strong dark hair, such good formation, not too fat etc. etc." Proud he was but to him one healthy baby was much the same as another to look at and, as this one was his, he was bound to be beautiful.

But best of all was the look of serenity on the face of his beloved Sheila. And so the weeks stretched to months and years and through the periods of development and setback, laughter and tears and trials and success, happiness, fear and joy the family grew up and gelled into a secure robust and happy unit.

A man of fifty who is still healthy and perhaps a little wealthy may have a mid life crisis. It should not really be called a crisis because it is not really a thing of pain, more like a re-awakening of urges buried in the long years of child rearing and family responsibility. Some men go yachting around the world; some

bury their urges in an alcoholic haze while some indulge stag-like in a hunt for a quarry or play golf. This might manifest itself by falling in love or perhaps having an affair or just a crush on a girl of say 28 or 30.

Well, it happened to Frank and Penny. She had degree in pathological genetics and was working, as it happened, in forensics at Scotland Yard. He told Sheila of his feelings for her after they had all met several times for dinner and their shared passion for the opera had bound them together on many enjoyable evenings. A strange threesome, but they had developed an affectionate working arrangement with few tensions and great satisfaction.

One afternoon, Penny and Frank, who were able to pass intimate luncheon dates in luxurious hotels, were chatting lightly about this and that when Frank mentioned the 'changeling' remark made by Susan at the recent family celebration.

"You know you could prove this thing either way," Penny remarked.

"Why would I want to do that? I've put it out of my mind for years."

Oh, because it is obviously on your mind. It troubles you, doesn't it?"

"Not really. I suppose it would be interesting but I love Jerry more than anyone, no I mean at least as much as Duncan. Duncan is so much like me I see all my flaws in him and that's

frustrating. I find Jerry so much easier to get on with, you know, he has more of Sheila in him, I suppose.”

“Or more of someone else perhaps.”

“What do you mean?”

“Oh nothing, I'm sorry I don't want to interfere but it was just a thought.”

Frank was quiet for a while and his thoughts inevitably went to Gupta.

“OK,” he said “just for the hell of it what do I have to do?”

“Just give me some genetic material from you and Sheila and Jerry and we'll run a quick analysis and see what we find out”

“Why Sheila?”

“You never know,” she said with a broad grin and a mischievous flash in her eye. “Actually it's just to prove the match and do the subtraction. That way we can show that there was or was not a third party.”

After a short silence he turned towards her and with an appealing and doubtful expression he said,

“Oh shit, I'm not at all sure about this. It's so bloody dangerous.”

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Anyway he did it. He took a hair from Sheila's brush and some peeled skin from the floor of his son's bedroom and pricked himself for a blood sample.

He handed these all over without much thought and forgot about the whole thing.

GENETIC FINGERPRINTING

The police have employed scientists for years to assist in the identity of suspects by the analysis of the DNA in human blood or even hair. Many a criminal has been convicted on the evidence. It is a small step to develop tests which will identify near kin and these tests are now reliable enough to sort out cases of kidnap and inheritance fraud among other things.

The result was that neither Sheila nor he were the parent of Jerry. Yes, he was a changeling, not the result of a cuckold but the result of a swap or mistake in the hospital. Suddenly this was very serious and worrying. At first Frank bottled up his knowledge and would discuss it only with Penny. Slowly the worm of this knowledge and how it had been learned ate away at their love and gradually destroyed their friendship.

Frank was now carrying the burden alone. Sheila was aware of his unhappiness but thought it was due to the loss of Penny. Her feelings were a mixture of relief and sorrow as she had been genuinely fond of Penny and had seen how Penny had made Frank more responsive to her, a better lover and less moody. But now he was worse. She could see something was truly eating into him and causing him a deep unhappiness.

One evening after yet another silent supper she ran out of patience with this moody creature who had even stopped saying "thank you" for his meals.

“What is wrong, Frank? We haven’t said a word all evening and you’re obviously unhappy.”

Frank was hesitant at first but he opened up and told her all about what he had found out.

“Oh, nonsense, darling. Surely you don’t take all that seriously? How could you?”

But later she came to accept that these questions had been eating away at her peace of mind since the graduation dinner also.

Jerry was inured to his uncertainty. He had decided long ago that there were several possible reasons for his dark complexion. He was very happy to be so good looking and so admired by girls and he decided that his parents were loving and good and what was the point of analysing his origin. Remarks from stupid older women and his school friends who called him Eyety or Paki or even nigger were easily ignored. He usually got his own back by equally insulting epithets such as Stinky, Cripple, Baldy and Werewolf and so on which all highlighted the least desirable attributes of his pals. He was clean and athletic and had strong wavy hair while his less fortunate pals had only one difference over him in that they were whiter. Well so what: He was better protected from the sun. But suddenly this could not be ignored. When Susan had called him ‘changeling’ and he remembered Mrs. Smagg in Greece who had said something similar about being a Pakistani or something. He felt he had to sit up and take notice.

He was at the age when curiosity can get the better of prudence and as he chose courses for his first university year in biology he decided to take a minor course in genetics. This was fascinating at first and had no personal relevance at all, but as they moved on to study the complexities of DNA the class began to relate the new knowledge to their own heredity. Conversations were exciting as they speculated about the origins of man and the races and divisions of the species and individual characteristics such as intelligence, sexuality, physique and so on.

Jerry became very friendly with a lively girl in this class. Her name was Ingrid and she was half Swedish. Her father had been an engineer in a famous electronics firm. His life had been cut short by a tragic motor accident three years previously. Her mother was English. Ingrid was a snow white blond, tall, long legged and toothy. Her wide smile spread to her liquid blue eyes and Jerry only had to think of her some nights when he was alone and tears of desire would cloud his vision. But not too many nights were alone lately as they managed to be together most of the time.

“Oh your skin is so rich,” she would say contrasting her own fair arms against his, the blond down of fine hairs highlighting the whiteness, while the brown of his seemed to be somehow more substantial and strong.

They were passing the time one evening watching some inane nonsense on television lounging on scruffy cushions surrounded by empty crisp cartons, pizza packets and sachets of sauce and mayonnaise when they started talking about genetic

fingerprints. Sharing one of those large cans of strong lager they had moved on to personal topics.

“I'm a changeling.” he said.

“Ohoo, here we go, what's all this?” she had a charming way of intoning her voice with a slight Scandinavian accent when she wanted to humour him. “My darling, you're feeling insecure,” she purred as she moved a little closer and taking his neck in her hand reached up and kissed him firmly thrusting her tongue between his lips.

Jerry pulled away gently placing his right hand high up on the inside of her thigh in a friendly loving gesture before sliding it slowly and sensuously free and reaching for the near empty can.

“I don't know if it's true but people have said so.”

“What would you think of your parents if it were true?” she asked, looking rather serious.

“Well, nothing really. I suppose it would have been a lucky accident. I love them and they have been really good to me and Duncan. Why would I think anything different ?”

“You might like to know who your real parents are.”

He stopped and thought awhile at the same time as someone was shot dead in the Spaghetti Western.

“Would I ? I doubt it”, and he reached out for her thigh again and this time she sensuously parted her legs and they fell

to lovemaking while on the screen lynchings took place on an old oak tree in a far off country.

Jerry did not pursue his hunt with any vigour. Rather, it seemed to pursue him. The professor of the class decided, as an exercise, to set the students a project. Out of the list Jerry and Ingrid, who had paired themselves up but were not paying much attention to the subjects offered for their investigation, were left with the choice of : “Investigate how the genetic development of the elephant compares with that of the giraffe in providing special a characteristic for survival.” Or “Develop an investigation which shows how genetic analysis might be used to prove some close relationship in a human situation.”

Jerry turned disinterestedly to Ingrid, “what do you want to do?” he said hardly reading the academese in front of him.

“Do you know anything about giraffes?”

So they settled on the human project and got it registered with the professor and went out cheerfully to lunch.

Some time later they realised the significance of what they had chosen. It was inevitable that they would investigate Jerry's origins. Neither even had to discuss it. Jerry decided that he was a little embarrassed to ask his father for a blood sample so he stole some dead skin from the bathroom after he'd been there and some hair from his mother's brush and pricked his finger for a blood sample himself. He then took the samples to the lab where the student technicians would do the analysis as part of their training.

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A week later when he went to get the results Jerry was so fascinated with the machinery and methods that he quite forgot the potential significance of his visit until the girl proffered him a small card and said.

“No match”

“Eh?”

“These people are not related. No commonality at the first generation level in any of the samples. This was what you wanted to know, eh?”

“Oh Yeah,” he said vaguely, his mind racing back to the remarks which had brought him here in the first place. “Hey, look, thanks a lot, you know, really nice of you, see you around,” and he left pushing through the swing door out into the cold wet evening.

Ingrid would be home by now. Her mother had asked her to visit for the weekend and Jerry had decided to stay at the Uni to catch up on some work on his main subjects. So much to learn; anatomy, species, habitats; suddenly it all became a mass of unlearned gibberish and he had got too far behind for comfort. Too much for a single young life.

He wandered over to the Union and sat down at the bar.

“Give us a pint of Grad' Tom, you old fart.”

“You don't look so happy, Jerry. What hit you?”

“Oh, just lost my parents, that's all”

“Balls, what the hell d'you mean?”

So Jerry told him and drank a few more beers. Tom, who was an old friend doing a course in Egyptian studies and did time behind the bar to boost his meagre parental allowance, listened in awe.

“My God, brother, sounds like hell. It can't be true. I mean they're your folks. They love you; they treat you well, don't they? I wouldn't have asked. Hey, why the hell did you turn over the stone? This one's on me.” And he pulled yet another pint for his gloomy friend.

Jerry was a bit wobbly when he left and in no fit state to study anything. There was a party going on and he followed some similarly relaxed people to a small terraced house where he easily fell

into an inane conversation about herbal remedies with a scruffy red-headed acquaintance of Inga's who led him to her bed and bounced up and down on him until he came in a great confused rush and immediately fell asleep snoring loudly as her shaggy terrier nuzzled around his stockinged feet.

He was woken by bright sunlight in his face.

“Christ, Julia, what am I doing here ?”

“Jerry, look at me and don't say you don't remember.”

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He remembered. Not clearly, but he remember her strong perfume and the trace of her body odour beneath and the feeling of comfortable warmth and friendship and the final rather befuddled release. He had been willing and even, for a few moments, keen to make love to her.

“OK, Julia. It was great.” He said rather unconvincingly. “I love you as much as ever, but I am in the wrong place. You know it.”

“Ingrid's away? I won't tell her.” She and Ingrid were good friends and this would not change anything even if Inga heard of it.

“Go. Frankie will be over after football training. Hey, cheer up I knew we'd make it one day,” and she flashed a great wink at him and the most mischievous smile he'd ever seen on her freckly face. Walking back across the wet streets of the town Jerry remembered what he had learned the day before.

What to do? He would leave his mobile phone switched off. He did not know what to say to anyone: Ingrid, his 'parents' his 'brother'. The rest of the day he tried to study and Sunday passed in a dreamy dilemma in which he relived all his childhood trying to find clues which would have indicated his parents complicity. He found none. It was a puzzle.

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SPLIFF

It wasn't hard for Ingrid to see that Jerry was worried by the news and his moods would change and some days he rejected her as if she were an alien and others he would cling to her like a drowning man. Lovemaking became erratic.

Slowly she decided that the best way to purge this thing was to find out the facts surrounding the situation. She wanted to prove that there had simply been an error and that the other changeling was another human being who was living happily somewhere else in good but swapped circumstances

At first it was difficult. No one wanted them to access the files or the information but one day they discovered the existence of a data base which was the Ph.D. theses of a post graduate in computer science. Known as Spliff to everyone had developed a theory that all the data from the hospital records could be condensed, compared with civic records and used in police work for the searching of lost persons and the confirmation of identities of criminals. He had been allowed to work on data up to twenty years old taken from seven hospitals around and the registry offices of four local districts. This small sample was enough to prove his theory which was projected to cut by a factor of ten the processing effort required to find matched or near matched information. This breakthrough led them to the answer.

It was a shock at first. Ingrid was shaking when she first saw it.

“Date 5th April 79, the same,. Look, hospital the same, time of birth the same, weight the same, name of mother, Patel, Palet, my God, look this may be it. There's a blank column here and here, what's this, Spliff?”

“Should be m or f.”

“How's that been left out?”

“Sometimes was. Carelessness. You won't believe how sloppy some of the records were in those days; in fact, even now. And that's another bonus my methodology is giving. By comparing all these records we are able to quickly correct the errors and omissions”

“My God,” said Jerry at last. He was smiling and giggling. He felt a sort of relief. Now he knew what had happened. No big deal. His mother was Indian. He was a Anglo-Indian. He was no longer interested. Perhaps some time in the future he would look for more details. Right now who cared less? Ingrid saw his relief and went to him and gave him a warm kiss and his response revealed to her that he was indeed as relaxed and responsive as ever.

“Spliff, you're OK man. You'll get a double Ph.D. for this. I'll buy you a beer one day, ciao, pal. Take care” Jerry took Ingrid under his right arm and they walked out together, united for the first time in weeks.

DINNER WITH MRS ANGSTROM

“Mum says come to supper and stay over,” Ingrid was a little unsure but her confidence was up because of Jerry's new found calmness.

“OK,” he said expressionlessly. He was actually not overjoyed. He found Mrs. Angstrom slightly hard to take. She was a bit too intelligent for Jerry but at the same time very highly strung and lacking in the sureness of confidence you would expect in the boss of a successful firm. She tended to take an opposing view especially if knew she would know better and seemed to demand that Jerry always acknowledged her general superiority. Jerry was used to parents being on level ground with himself. But he knew it would please Ingrid so he would go and eat Julia's microwaved leg of lamb and noisette potatoes.

He had been right to be apprehensive about the invitation. Julia was up to her tricks. She opened the evening by being bossy and patronising and just as Jerry was beginning to feel slightly relaxed due to the effect of good food and a glass or two of wine she dropped the bombshell.

“Inga tells me your father was Indian, I mean your BIOLOGICAL father” This she said as if biology had suddenly become the epitome of everything disgusting and distasteful in the world.

Jerry was amazed and looked over to Ingrid who was choking on a mouthful of Brussels sprouts.

“Oh for Christ's sake, mother,” she spluttered.

He was surprised but recovered quickly and he smiled easily.

“Yes that's why my skin is a bit dark. I think it's why I'm good at maths as well; I don't know who she was. I sort of found out by accident. Ingrid helped me a bit. This nerd was working on a project. Anyway; so what?”

“Oh, nothing. Of course Indians are very clever and cultured and, well, there are lots of them over here now. It's not as if you're alone”.

Jerry suddenly got the meaning. He was looking directly at the two women who were sitting on the adjacent and opposite sides of the table and he saw that they were very alike, tense and mean. He did not stop to wonder why Ingrid had such a disagreeable and false smile or why she resembled her mother so closely. He just felt slightly sick and got up and left.

He didn't go back to their flat. For the next two weeks Jerry lodged with Tom and buried himself in his studies. Ingrid spent lonely nights counting herself to sleep as she bitterly cursed Jerry for refusing to see her any more. She finally bundled up his things, which amounted to surprisingly little, and he collected them one Saturday. She put on a cheerful smile as he stoically shoved bags and boxes into the back of his car, pecked her on the cheek and listlessly drove off.

FRANK AND JAMSED

Frank was on to the trail. The only way he could absolve the enormous self doubt seemed to be to get to the truth. Maybe the whole thing was a mistake. Perhaps everything would be fine. But doubts were eating away at him. His work was suffering and he was snappy at home.

He had a rather more roundabout way of arriving at the records which had been available to Jerry.

He had a contact at the Town Hall who was able to get authority to go back over years of records with out all the red tape usually put in the way of the general public wanting public information. And, of course, he saw the facts from a different viewpoint. He immediately concluded that the father was an Indian and he went a bit further and had the birth certificates produced so he could see the names of both parents. There it was plain to see: Jamsed Patel and Nancy Patel father and mother of Tracy Yamsin Patel, time date and hospital the same as Frank Palet, Sheila Palet and their son Jeremy Palet.

It was no small task to find out where they lived for it turned out that there are more Patels in the London telephone directory than there are Smiths. After two days of phoning surprised plumbers, accountants shopkeepers and possibly some pimps and many general traders he was surprised by a sniff of success:

“Is that Mr. Jamsed Patel ?”

“Dr. Jamsed , yes.”

“Ah” for some reason his rhythm was broken by the title,

“ Erm, daughter, Tracy Yamsin.?”

“So ?”

Although the conversation was going so badly he felt a new excitement choking him. He daren't pitch his hopes too high.

“Twenty, birthday 5th April?” he blurted out.

“May I know to whom I am speaking, please?” the Indian intonation and phraseology was just detectable.

“Are you a doctor ?”

“I have a Ph.D. In accountancy and law” Frank relaxed as he sensed the insecurity lying behind the evident pomposity. “And my daughter is not here,” he said, as if this were another valuable academic qualification.

“Doctor Jamsed, I am very interested in the well-being of your daughter and I would very much like to meet you to discuss various matters concerning her.” This was a prepared sentence and he said it as if learnt from a script.

“Is it about more treatments? For God's sake! costs me a fortune. Sorry, sorry. Of course, sir, my dear Tracy. Well actually I can't really help. You see, her mother. She was a... well we didn't.....She lives elsewhere now with the girl. Five years ago I was

restrained from seeing them. I wouldn't be able to find them. I send money to a lawyer when they demand it. Bloody, damn millstone.”

“Can you give me a clue?”

“Why should I? I mean who the damn hell are you?”

Frank was stumped. He had prepared a couple of answers for question but he had not expected such hostility and resistance. One gambit was to say he had money for her. He was reluctant to trust Jamsed with this in case he was ridiculed. So he tried the second tack

“Oh, my son knows her. You know, boy-girl. Asked me to see her and tell her some news as I was passing through.” He knew he was not being believed.

“Boy friend ? That cripple!” he said it as if he were describing a rodent. “Is your boy a cripple then?”

Frank was stunned. This telephone conversation was not working. He knew he had to see this man face to face to avoid any more surprises and misunderstandings.

“Look, can I come over to see you now, please.” He said it with such persuasive force that no one could have refused. Jamsed told him the way.

They met on the doorstep after Jamsed had opened the door.

“She had an accident or what?.” He felt his heart in his throat.

“Birth defect. I don't know; I tried to love, you know. I tried, you know very well. But that woman, her mother. She wanted me excluded at first. Then, well she went all to pieces. I have a business to run. Very serious business. I am the bread winner. I had a status to keep up. I was struggling. Yes I was struggling, you know. It's not easy for us. Very much prejudice. Difficulties.” He had run out of steam and Frank could see he was near to tears. Tears of self pity and regret, of chances lost, priorities misplaced, people abused and his God and finest instincts ignored.

Suddenly he straightened up his short fat body and gained dignity.

“Now, I am sure you are genuinely concerned, but what is your business with my daughter. I think the story of your son may not be exactly precise”

“May I come in, please?” Frank asked and moved slightly in towards his reluctant host.

“Oh, my goodness me, please be coming in”. Jamsed moved back down the hall.

“You're right about my son. It's not true. The fact is I believe their may have been a mix up a long time ago. I don't know how or why and I 'm not sure I should have tried to find out, but I am past the point of return. You are in this with me whether you

like it or not. For this I apologise because I am about to cause you distress.”

Suddenly the smaller man was deflated and he waved the other into the small lounge.

“It's not big but it's only for me. I don't hold with having too many possessions.”

Frank went in. The room was a mismatched mish-mash of Indian and European styles mostly of the more exclusive kind, but tasteless. Expensive leather furniture was covered with Indian loose cloth of silk and the floor was covered in a mess of small Kashmir rugs. There were souvenirs from European cities mixed in with Indian artefacts and, in gilt frames, photos of dark people in bright sunlight and pale people in dull cloudy settings. There was a lot of the latest stereo equipment and racks of CDs. The place was clean but characterless.

“What have you come to tell me?”

Frank began to feel like a small boy who was being forced to make a confession of some awful misdemeanour.

“I have just checked the genetic material of my son and it is not mine. I mean he is not my biological son. My God, I love that boy. He is ... well” he stuttered. “He has to be yours by the evidence.”

He raised his eyes and wiped them. The smaller man was staring at him with amber eyes. He had understood.

“This is outrageous, you come in here out of the blue and you tell me the whole of my lonely, messed up life is because of some mistake. You stole my son. You took what was mine. Now you confess to me in my own home. I have lost my son and now you have the very cruelty to tell me to my face.”

Frank saw the aggression and began to rise internally to it but he was surprised and a great question arose in his mind. Why is this man angry at me? I am confessing, I am on my knees to him.

“Yes, you arrogant unfeeling bloody bastard. What is it to me that you have my son. He is grown and gone. So why do you want to find your useless crippled girl?” He taunted.

Frank was suddenly filled with disgust. The man was a monster, a petty lawyer or accountant. He got up to leave.

“Look, we are all shocked. I must go. Here's my card. Please, call me when you can discuss this.”

“Get out. But take this” he thrust another business card into Frank's hand. “This is the lawyer. You will find her that way.”

It was on the way home that a most shocking realisation hit him. He felt the colour rising in the back of his neck and a sweat came out on his forehead.

THE TRIAL

Long ago, in fact twenty years ago, he had asked Sheila to take part in a trial. The trial was for his company and a new drug for pregnant women suffering from morning sickness and other pre natal problems. He, as salesman for Sorche Drugs, had been asked to have his pregnant wife join the trial. The anodyne had passed all the tests and was already approved for use in Britain but the company was running a trial on the commercial presentation. The drug was in three forms, a capsule, a liquid and a clear, easy-to-swallow lozenge and the firm wanted to know which was the most attractive for women sufferers.

He had taken home the samples to Sheila and offered them to her. With Thalidomide in mind she had refused for weeks but when her symptoms became so severe as to cause her nausea all day she had given in and taken the medicine in one form or another for the rest of the pregnancy.

She accepted it as one of the perks of being married to a drug representative.

It was two years after the birth of Jerry that the scandal broke. Yet again corruption had ensured that a drug with a chemical similarity to Thalidomide had been released on to the market. Birth defects had come to light in a few cases, less severe but similar. The blame was evaded by Sorche. Frank, who was now burdened with two children and a heavy mortgage, was in no

position to protest on principle. And after all his wife had used the drug and produced a fine unblemished son.

He was forced to pull over to the side of the road as he envisaged the face of the poor distressed Patel. He had never before felt physically sick with guilt. It took him a good ten minutes before he felt well enough to drive on.

JERRY AND TRACY

It hadn't been hard for Jerry to track down Tracy. He had found, while using the internet for some information on food sources for Borneo orang-utans, that there was a data base for all National Union of Students members and just on the off chance of coming good he had typed in Tracy Patel and come up with three strikes. When he added Yamsin he got only one. She was at Kingston University in the school of Art. He was tingling with nervous energy and he stood up to relieve the tension. He was unable to work. He walked out of the library with his books and went straight to his car. Throwing the books into the back he unthinkingly got in and drove out of the carpark and into the road.

Kingston is about 5 miles away and through the London traffic but he had done the whole drive automatically only pausing when he got tangled in the unfamiliar streets of the Southern Suburbs. He had stopped at a McDonalds for a burger and a coke and only then had he thought about his next move.

As he ate the tasteless patty-in-bun he tried to form a plan for the rest of the evening. Maybe he should go straight to the art school just in case. This was like walking up to a haystack to find a needle but what else? He would think of something.

He arrived and was surprised at the scruffy appearance of the rather run-down annex buildings which were marked as his destination. He parked on the street and entered the first of the buildings. No one was in the lobby so he took the stairs two at a

time and walked into a large room which was obvious the result of the removal of many dividing walls from the original house. Several students were sitting around on flat heavy work tables with half done plaster sculptures, tools, bowls of congealed paste and other unprepossessing objects.

He had no time or inclination for niceties. "Hi guys, I'm looking for Tracy Patel."

"Yeah? Who's she ?" said a skin headed dude with rings in his ears nose eyes etc.

"Kennee." said a skinny pale girl in a tee shirt several sizes too big for her diminutive chest. "Crippy, Darling Crippy. Does those big happy-crappy pictures. Second year or first. Sweetheart, you know. Don't be such an arsehole, Kenny baby. She came to our flat thing, yeah?"

"Right" said Kenny, showing no interest as he lit a thin cigarette he'd been rolling.

"I'm Fay" said the girl, standing up and pulling the tee shirt down a bit to stretch it against her chest almost liberating her small right nipple through the very floppy neck hole. She noted Jerry's absolute lack of interest and assumed Crippy and he must have serious business

"Look," she said "we all love Tracy.... and the stuff she DOES... blow your MIND, you know all fuzzy and then always a CROWD real FOCUSSED," she paused " but, well she's a bit weird. I suppose its being...well you know."

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“Shut up Fay,” said another straggly haired youth and turning to Jerry he continued. “All you do is go back out of this door down the passage, into the room opposite and she’s usually there”

There was nobody in the room. He stood inside the door and looked around. On the wall behind the door on fine cloth, not canvass, stretched on enormous frames were a series of paintings. The scenes were rural although there was no actual background detail. The subjects in all the paintings were figures. They were clothed but the clothes were rendered transparent by the movement of the bodies. In one all the people were dancing and gesticulating, gracefully active and very alive. In another the figures were labourers, all very muscular and beautifully detailed. In another there were bathers on a beach, many naked but not obscene. All the paintings were marked by an extreme and comprehensive mix of races showing typical features, not stiff like textbook pictures but flowing with personality and connected by a common humanity; not separated by their diverse appearances. About six to ten figures in each were typical, beautifully detailed but surreal because of the lack of oppressive clothes and surroundings.

“These are mine for next week. Have you come to preview them?”

“No, but I'm looking for Tracy Patel, you know her?” As he said it his eye saw in the bottom of one of the pictures neat and clear T.Y.P.

“Me,” she said “why do you want to see me?” She limped across the room to where he was standing and he noticed

her left hand was shrivelled and stubby, but the fingers of her right hand were long and slender. When she was on the high step of her limp, on the right leg, she was tall, on the low step, a bit crooked. Her eyes were on his, challenging and angry. They were hazel and hers had a special transparency, mother's eyes, kind eyes, familiar eyes.

Jerry had no idea what to say. He was there, after all, on an impulse, unprepared. He had come upon her unexpectedly fast like a hunter surprised by his wild quarry, realising he has not loaded his gun.

“You well, you.....can we talk somewhere.”

Suddenly Tracy was angry she did not want this oaf disturbing her work. ‘God almighty you couldn't go for a pee without someone sneaking in and trying to chat you up about your stuff. And now this one had dried up completely. Probably noticed my limp and my hand and just lost interest.’

“Oh yes, what about? Artificial legs?”

‘Cruel’, she thought. ‘Why do I always spoil chances by being so aggressive? He may be OK.’ She said to herself and immediately changed her mind. She was suddenly bored with the small illustrations she was working on. She had been struggling with a Taureg wedding group. They would not flow or move but stuck to the paper like blobs.

“OK let's go, the union bar; alright? You buying.”

“Right,” he said.

She had a cider and he just had a half of College Ale.

It had been hard to break the ice. She was defensive and cold. He was nervous and self conscious. When he told her his suspicions and then about the confirmation she exploded with fury.

“That bloody bastard Patel. I hate, hate, hate him. I used to think he was my father. He's a shit a total shit.” She was hissing so as not to attract attention of the other drinkers who, fortunately were absorbed in their own business. “He used to beat Mum, he beat me. We left the little shit but I was forced to see him regularly every Sunday and he spoilt me and I looked up to him and he was smarmy but all the time he didn't love me. He hated me for being a cripple. You know, he was a Muslim. He thought I was a curse from Allah. He SUFFERED me.” She had tears in her eyes. Jerry was not sure whether they were from anger or sadness.

“And you! What are they like? The parents you stole from me. Are they good people? They stole you and traded you for me! Oh, oh, oh,” and she started to sob as all the hurt of twenty years of teasing and ragging and being despised by her father and having to live with her bitter mother welled up inside her. Jerry could say nothing he just stood close and she came forward into his arms.

“Take me home, please,” she asked meekly and Jerry took her hand and they looked to the world like a couple facing a passing tragedy together as they left hand in hand. They entered her room together but before Jerry had time to get orientated she turned to him and said,

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“Thanks for bringing me home but, please, get out. I can't handle this with you. Just leave me alone.”

FRANK

Frank was out on the road. After seeing the lawyer he had shied away from visiting the mother and daughter preferring to try to find out what had really happened on the night of the births. He had only managed to find out who were the permanent midwives on the ward, but not who had been on duty that night. Iris Stone was one. He recognised the name.

Frank had never liked Iris. She was insecure and frightened. He had met her once or twice when she had been assigned to Sheila as a student. He thought the girl had formed a most unhealthy dependency on Sheila. However Iris had disappeared as soon as she had finished her studentship.

"You bloody two faced bitch," he rehearsed as he washed in the shower at the hotel. You and that bloody Iris. Stupid pair of idiots. My God what a cock-up. His heart went out to Patel. His life had been wrecked all because of his wife and a conniving little twerp of a midwife. He was so furious thinking that all the affection he had for Jerry was somehow tainted and suddenly tears welled up in his eyes as he thought of the crippled daughter he had never met, never held, never comforted and that this girl had suffered Patel as an incompetent and bitter father. He knew he would have done better. He would have cared however ugly her deformities. He cried in the shower, great tears falling with the water to the floor. He hadn't sobbed like this since he was at school. It did not make him feel better; in fact it hardened him. He felt reduced. As an aggressively competitive person he started pulling himself together and formed a plan. First he must deal with Sheila.

She was unforgivable. He did not care a damn about Iris who he now recognised as a piece of human flotsam. His mission was to find the mother and his daughter. So he drove home.

Sheila was surprised to see him as it was only Wednesday and his trip was planned until Friday.

"Don't cook for me," he said without preamble. "I will be leaving. But first I have some stuff to say. I can't believe it but the facts are plain to see. You have wrecked lives with your shitty little scheme. You have a man nearly on the point of suicide. You have a girl and her mother living in misery. And now, when all the facts are out, you're going to ruin our happy home. I mean, shit, how could you have even thought of doing such a thing? I knew that girl was dangerous. That little lesbian bitch, Iris." As he paused for breath and a fresh vitriolic inspiration Sheila managed to say:

"Frank! Stop, stop. For God's sake what's got into you? What are you talking about?"

"Oh you don't know, you don't know? Of course you bloody well know. You knew the baby was a cripple so you, you, my God I can't even say it. You bloody well changed the babies with the help of that conniving little bitch Iris. I mean. What I have seen today. A man completely messed up. A successful man... told me his life was pure hell. Exact words: screwed up." Frank was running out of steam now. He was not practised at this behaviour and neither was Sheila. She was unable to muster opposition. They just didn't have rows. They never insulted each other, never raised their voices. She slumped down in a low chair. Sheila was frightened.

“Well, I'm going out to find our daughter” He stood and before Sheila could react he had gone and she heard his car drive off. She was shaking but she did not cry. She sat there still and silent for an hour or more until Duncan came in noisily from the pub. She made him coffee and she went to bed without discussing anything.

SHEILA AND IRIS

Sheila had not reacted immediately to the remarks made at the graduation party. Her confidence in the past was so strong that it took a long time for her to have any doubts. After Frank had broken off all contact with Penny she was worried about the reasons and slowly came to the realisation that it was all to do with the origins of her son Jerry. Frank's recent outburst had frightened her so much that she decided she had to take some action.

It was hard for her to come to terms with the slightest possibility that Jerry was not the son of Frank and herself. She knew for sure that there was no other man involved with her.

She presumed the key to the problem lay with the midwife. She remembered the name of the girl because they had worked together for a short time and she had been surprised to see a familiar face on the day of the birth.

It took her some time to trace the path of Iris through the Royal College of Midwives; living in London after she had reportedly emigrated to New Zealand. Having traced her, she hesitated to contact her because the whole situation suddenly looked farcical yet frightening. She had a great temptation to let sleeping dogs lie and if it hadn't been for Frank's tirade she would probably have weakened at that point.

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However she decided she must lay this old ghost so she took courage and phoned one evening.

It was precisely half past seven when the phone surprised Iris who was slumped in her big old armchair after another exhausting day out on the District.

"Iris. Watson?" Sheila said having found her married name from the register.

Iris found the voice was slightly familiar, a voice from the past, female and authoritative

"Yes," she said.

"This is Sheila. You remember? Sheila Palet, you delivered our son."

She was apprehensive, immediately on guard as Sheila continued:

"Look I wondered if you could come round for drinks one evening. You know the kids are growing up. For old times' sake. You could see the fruits of your labour, or my labour and your timely intervention." She was lying. She knew she would not have Jerry or Duncan anywhere near when Iris arrived.

"Oh I don't know. It was so long ago. You know, I live a very quiet life now. How did you find me?"

“Come on, don’t be so silly. We’d love to see you.” Sheila struggled to sound warm and welcoming as she avoided answering the question and carried on cheerfully:

“Tuesday around six thirty?” She’d done her research and knew Iris would not be on late duty. “That would be so nice,” and she replaced the receiver quickly before Iris could come up with an excuse.

Three days later Iris arrived on the doorstep.

“Oh, do come in Iris, such a long time and you look so good. I’m fighting the inch war and losing.”

Sheila made tea and got Iris to start talking about herself.

She had been married for a very short time to a Jack Watson. Jack had been an ambulance man, a New Zealander and an ex naval orderly. He had been good fun to start with and they had moved to New Zealand. In the beginning Iris had found this exciting and exotic but after two years she discovered that Jack had sexual hang-ups which compounded problems of her own. After several violent assaults she was left frigid and frightened while he reverted to pornography, strip shows and old girlfriends for his relief.

She had moved back to London, divorced by post, and now she lived in a small flat alone. She kept a cat for company and read romantic novels voraciously. She contacted her parents on their birthdays and Christmas and went regularly to classes in Italian

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language which she enjoyed. She was able to mentally escape the bustle of London. Her annual holiday was always to Italy where she enjoyed the culture and sultry evenings in Rome and Florence and from time to time a little romance with another holiday maker or a stray Italian Lothario.

Sheila steered the conversation back to the night of Jerry's delivery. She remembered clearly her own plight at the time.

She had been having a hard time. She had been given an epidural, too much pethidine and was gasping at the nitrox so she was in another world no longer aware of what was happening. Frank had been called away to a difficult client in the afternoon having waited up all the previous night. The apeisiotomy from Duncan's birth had left inelastic scar tissue to cause an unyielding passage and there had been a delay in getting the obstetrician to the theatre.

She vaguely remembered a rumpus in the corridor outside the theatres.

“What was that all about?”

Iris filled in some detail as she remembered vividly what she had heard:

“I am knowing my bloody rights,” that angry voice with Indian intonation had said. “I will be in there. I need to see what is happening.”

“Mr. Patel, please, it is not permitted.” They had heard in the theatre.

“Of course it is. My very good colleague Mr. Fred Jones was at the birth of his son.”

The obstetrician, being the only male around and being in authority was called out to deal with this.

That was the moment Sheila had gone into a great paroxysm of pain and effort and the baby was ejected into Iris's hands who wrapped the child immediately. They had severed the cord very efficiently and Sheila had slumped back on the bed unconscious.

“Quick Doctor get back in. I'm worried for the mother.” Iris had yelled before carrying the baby to the prep room next door as out of the corner of her eye she saw an enormous flood of blood surge out of the vagina and onto the sheets. She laid the baby in the crib and was about to do the examination and cleanup when the opposite door opened.

“Iris, thank God, Look Mrs. Patel is being very difficult. She won't relax and we are really ready. The obst. has buzzed off and we need a hand.”

So Iris had gone in and delivered the other baby and the first born was left unattended in the crib for all of half a minute. The assistant from the other theatre came in and, seeing the baby in the crib, noticed also that the right ankle was not encircled with the identity band. The child was a girl and a pink band was just by the cot so she just picked it up knowing it was supposed to be attached to the baby's right ankle.

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She was not to know that Iris, who knew she would deliver both children, had placed both pairs of bands by the cribs. Soon the commotion was over in the second theatre and Iris emerged with the second child. There were two bands just as she expected. A blue and a pink one her toe just missed the third band which lay innocently where it had fallen. Naturally she picked the blue one as the child she held was very clearly male. She glanced at the name and according to the procedure tore the clip off the unused band and threw it in the receptacle.

Then, shattered from the exertions of the last half hour she turned to the junior nurse and asked for a glass of water.

“We’ll scrub them up nicely and by then the mothers may even be ready.”

Then there was a crash at the door and a short dark man came hurtling in staggering and stinking of non-surgical alcoholic spirit.

“You are holding my child against my will,” he said and then launched into a tirade of abuse against the hospital, racism in England, the National Health and the World in general. The two women's natural instinct was to defend their new charges against this onslaught so they stood firmly in front of the cribs and two passing porters came in and forcibly removed the distraught Dr. Patel.

It was then, as she sipped thoughtfully at her glass of water, she had noticed something amiss with the labels on the ankle bands. It was not obvious but something worried her.

“My God” she said and was about to say more when the baby girl's left foot emerged from under the sheet in a weak kick.

“Look.” said the staff nurse “Oh dear, this one has a problem”. So they had unwrapped her and they saw the deformed left hand as well.

“Hm. Better call the paediatrician straight away. Where is he anyway ?. He was here just now.”

The paediatrician shouldered his way in through the swing doors. He had a clip board and entered the details from the ankle tag on to the sheet and then noted the deformities.

“Oh dear,” he said. “This is a bit unusual. Better get the history as this looks a bit like a transplacental drug syndrome”.

The phone rang. “Iris” said the staff nurse “Epsom ward, Mrs. Harding”

She had left the scene only too pleased to have a reason to put her doubts out of her mind.

As it happened she had been busy for the next four hours and the scene in the delivery theatre had changed as several mothers and babies passed through. Iris and the other duty midwife the two staff nurses the assistants and porters had not rested until around five when they had started to do the end of shift tidying and locking and checking. The ward cleaners had arrived to get all the

domestic arrangements set up for the day and the staff had done their hand-overs and left with thoughts of home and bed on their minds.

Iris had gone home in a cold funk. She was frightened, which was not unusual. Her life had been a series of fearful experiences. Her ambitious father had wrecked their home by being an enormous success at making money and a dismal failure in his relationships. Mother had lived in fear although he had never committed actual violence he had crushed her spirit with a combination of cutting criticism and extravagant largesse. She had wanted for nothing except warmth and love and self-esteem. And then her father, whom she remembered only for his sneering criticism of her paltry efforts to please him, had been regularly absent and her mother had withdrawn into her shell giving little warmth or help to her needful daughter.

Nursing had been, for her, a chance to be a part of something greater. There were excellent people to emulate and there were doctors who were dashing and clever and decisive. She had chased and worshipped a series of young housemen who had generally dismissed her after a few evenings out and a tearful emotional breakdown after a few neurotic unfulfilled nights in bed .

She had chosen midwifery as her speciality but had been sent to complete a block of duty on the General wards and that was when she had been assigned into Sheila's care.

Sheila was always good with juniors and was able to guide them gently and be at the same time firm. Sheila, naturally outgoing cheerful and focussed on her work, did not notice the

dependency and lack of self direction in Iris until gradually the girl had become so clingy she felt acutely embarrassed to be with her.

Iris would for ever remember one particular night when Sheila had lost her usual control and shouted cruel words at her. How she had raged after she got back to her little room and how she had sobbed when the rage had passed. But the next day Sheila had been kind and apologised so Iris's heart had swelled up with affection, she changed her behaviour quite consciously and never again did they have a cross word.

So, only a few years later, she had been given the chance to repay her mentor's kindness with a most wonderful gift; a perfect child. She had fantasised that the whole episode was God given. Occasionally a shudder ran down her spine and she had some doubts but she rationalised these by asserting that the episode with the name tags had never happened. She had read Palet instead of Patel or was is Patel instead of Palet?. She had done nothing wrong, she wasn't even sure she had seen anything wrong happen. After a few months the incident had passed from her mind only to return when she was either depressed or very happy. In depression it haunted her that she had not double-checked or followed the correct procedure; in elation she saw herself as a sort of angel bringing Sheila a gift.

Now facing Sheila and explaining all the circumstances old doubts returned.

“So what you are saying is,” said Sheila, after a long pause for thought “is that there is a possibility that the children were swapped round.”

“Well, no, I suppose it's just possible,” she conceded fearing a trap, “yes.”

“Why the hell didn't you say anything?”

“I wasn't sure. We were rushed and I had to leave, and then it was too late. Also the girl was deformed. I assumed it was all right and it had been my imagination.”

“Did her deformities influence you? I mean why did you ignore the chances of a mistake?”

“What about the bloods?”

“What? Oh, the babies' blood tests. Yes, well, I thought at the time that would shift the responsibility away from me and any error would be picked up when they were checked. Only afterwards did I realise that there were no gender marks on the phials, just the surnames, so perhaps they could have been switched also.”

Both women were exhausted after reliving the past. Iris asked if she could lie down for a little as she had a bad attack of migraine. Anything to avoid more alarming questions.

“Only half an hour and I'll be fine. You know this might not have happened at all. There was no real reason to assume there was a mistake” She did not sound convincing.

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“Well there seems to be now and I want to be sure. Go and have a rest upstairs. I'll show you, and we'll have a drink when you feel better.”

NANCY.

Her place was in Kentish Town. A small terraced house in a street which was part way through 'gentrification'.

This particular house was not gentrified but run down. He rang the doorbell. It was answered quickly as if he were expected. The woman who opened it was tall and angular, about the same height as Frank. She had a strong face with full lips and deep extremely expressive eyes.

“Mr. Palet?” He had phoned ahead to be sure she would be in.

“Thank you.” She led the way in to the small living room.

“Tea, coffee, gin or anything else?”

“Tea,” he said because it seemed to be appropriate.

“I'm having gin, won't you join me; G &T?”

He immediately felt wrong footed. He yearned for a long cold effervescent alcoholic drink.

“You are right. I would like one, long and cold” A very wide and welcoming smile split her face like a ray of sunshine and he could not help smiling back. He relaxed a little and when he took the first mouthful of the powerful drink he felt a gentle rush pass from the back of his neck downwards.

He looked the room. A similar mish-mash of mismatched European and Oriental artefacts to the ones in her husband's house was here but in much smaller quantities. She had possibly sold some of the more valuable pieces.

“Do you know why I have contacted you?”

“Well, I may do. You see, Tracy had some trouble a little time ago and we all had blood tests to see what was the cause. The doctor had said that there was something a bit strange about the groups and he didn't understand why. I asked more and he said it was impossible to produce O positive from A negative and B negative. These groups are later in human development and although O dominates where one parent has it. It does not occur where neither has. At least that's how he explained it. I forced it out of mind because she was my little darling and so brave and clever I did not want to know anything that might shatter my bond with her. We were emotionally fragile because of Jamsed's awful behaviour.

“Because of your questions on the phone I assumed you were going to tell me something. Well I'm ready. It won't change anything now. She's grown and away. I loved her and gave her the best I could. I'm proud of her. So what about my child? Do you have another child? My child. Is he a boy or she a girl?”

She was on the sofa and brought her legs up under her dropping her shoes as she did so. She took a long draught from her glass and looked directly at him.

He was surprised at her coolness. She looked now like a child ready for a favourite story. He was unsure how to begin. He was expecting fury at least as bad as all the rest of the people involved.

“He’s a boy. Very handsome, tall, very kind and fun to be with. I mean you should meet him. We love him and he’s been so good and given so much love back. I mean, you know. He’s just a boy. He’s very bright. Mathematics, but he chose to read Biology at university. Said it was a challenge anyway there is a lot of maths involved, he says... I didn’t know that.”

He realised he was gushing.

“Is he dark or fair?”

“I’ve already met your Husband,” he said. “Yes, Jerry’s no blond. He’s dark for our family. We are rather fair in general.”

She looked directly at him and her face took on an expression of extreme seriousness.

“When I first suspected what had happened I went through a stage of rejection. At one time I couldn’t bear Tracy near me. Her voice sounded trill, her continual whining caused me to lash out on several occasions. I started on Valium and got into that too deep and had to be detoxed. It was a bad time. But now we are so tight. I feel her all the time. We are very close.

“People say these things happen and you never believe them, and then in the end, what difference does it make? But it made a difference to us at the time. Jamsed was absolutely floored by the fact he had a cripple, a birth defective child. Not the perfect son he wanted but a tainted girl. Then he blamed me for smoking pot ten years earlier. He was really bitter. That was when he got violent.

“He's very clever. He saved my life in India. I'll tell you how we met.” Her expression softened again and Frank felt the tension go out of the air.

“It was mid sixties, the hippy trail. I was with a bunch of Kaama seekers. We'd hitch-hiked from Europe through Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and into Gujarat. I got sick with sandfly fever, as it turned out. The others didn't know what to do so they left me at some terrible clinic and wandered off to Goa. I was suicidal, one of the side effects of the fever. He saw me wandering in the street and picked me up and brought me home to his parents' house. They got a doctor for me and I was there recuperating for a couple of weeks. He was the perfect gentleman and he took me out and showed me round and I fell for him. He was short but very fit, very strong and he had immense charm and he was affectionate but very correct. He did brilliantly at university.” She paused. Frank took a sip from his drink and waited patiently for her to resume.

“It was a new and exotic experience for me and they were very happy times in the fertile countryside roundabout. His mother was kind and his father, rather severe and aloof. Anyway, one thing led to another and we were engaged.

“Of course he wanted to go to England and the whole large family expected that of him. We married within the year. The family needed a British connection and I was the key to the whole thing. I don't say that he only married me for my passport, but I think it may have been in the back of his mind all the time.”

Frank looked at her and saw all that experience written on her face.

“We visited again four years later. He had just bought a Mercedes in Germany, a big limousine, so it seemed anyway. You know. It had two headlights sort of one on top of the other. He worshipped it. Of course he had to drive it to India to show his friends and family that he'd made it big in England and his white wife with him. For me it was hell.”

Nancy's eyes narrowed and her face hardened and Frank felt the tension return as she continued:

“He was poisonous in the car. He treated me like so much unwanted baggage. I had done the trip overland before and knew the way in a few places where he would have been lost alone, and he resented that. He resented my tiredness and the fact that I was being sick in the mornings, and all bloody day because of the car and the heat. Of course the air conditioner broke down in the middle of Iran. And then he started to get tight with the money because we had gone over budget. Everything had to be on budget. Typical accountant. So we started sleeping in the car mostly. This was Afghanistan., freezing at night unbearably hot by day and everywhere menacing tribesmen with guns on horseback who surrounded us whenever we stopped. Anyway we made it to

Islamabad and, thank goodness met his brother. Then we all then went over the border.”

Frank's mind had wandered. He had visited the Khyber Pass with Sheila. He remembered how wild the terrain was and how some tribesmen had indeed rode past their Land Cruiser as they had been negotiating hairpin bends on the poorly maintained road.

She went on:

“Everything was different of course. He had no time for me after he had paraded me in front of his friends and relations. I was sent out back to sit with the other repressed women in the kitchen or ladies room. Often they only spoke two words of English and after a short polite silence would resume their chatter in Urdu of which I only knew about two words.

“Finally I had enough so I called my parents. That was a battle in itself. They sent me the air fare inventing a story about Dad being ill and needing my help. I suppose it was then things began to go wrong. But he always blamed it on the birth of the baby.”

She stood up and went over to the sideboard. Remembering Frank she turned. “another?”

“Why not?” he smiled sympathetically.

They sipped in silence for a few moments.

“I had told him where I was having the baby but I often wished I hadn’t,” she said bitterly.

“Well, he drove back in the big Mercedes with his brother and arrived just in time. I was a terrible mother at the birth. The baby was late, I suppose, and I was in and out of consciousness. I heard Jamsed making a noise outside but told the doctor to keep him away. I had no time for him. I was the one in pain and I didn't think he would do me any good.”

“When they told me the baby was deformed I was frightened. It was because I knew Jamsed would take it badly. At first he put on a good show but soon he began going through phases of self recrimination. He blamed himself for drinking whisky. Being a Muslim this made sense to him and it was reinforced by some article he'd read about alcohol related birth defects. He'd forgotten that it was about alcoholic women.

“When she was about three I went through a bad time. I rejected her myself. He left me. She went into care for a while. Well, I took her back after about six months and managed to cope for another two years without any help from him. It was pretty bloody. I had to work because he was being awkward about money. Usual thing, promises broken, lies and sob stories. He said he was almost suicidal and I was having nightmares until I started on Valium. That stabilised me for a while but its effects wore off and I had to face life with, what seemed, a dulled sense of reality.

“I sued for divorce, and in the settlement it was decided she should go to boarding school. A convent was found where there was a bursary dedicated to a disabled child every year.

The school seemed very good and the people were kind and she thrived in the atmosphere. For the first time in her life she had friends and was engaged in normal activities,

“We took it in turns to visit and gradually we made a decent thing of it. She stayed with me during the holidays and Jamsed continued visiting on alternate Sundays. This is how it was for years, we watched her grow and I became very proud and I began to be obsessed by her progress and very lonely when she was away at school and even jealous when it was Jamsed’s turn to visit. Now she’s fully grown I seem to have grown up too. She is a brilliant artist and I can see so much in her pictures. So much beauty. It’s such a joy to see her happy and productive. The happiness is deeper. She was always cheerful and full of smiles but there was underlying insecurity which I could sense.”

Frank was listening intently but there was a pause and he heard a key turning in the front door. Suddenly he felt panicked. Was he about to meet his daughter for the first time?

A tall blond girl limped into the room. A radiant smile dissolved as she looked from Nancy to Frank.

The recognition was instant.

“My God, what are you doing here?”

“Do you know who I am ?” he said, surprised.

“I should do. We are flesh and blood aren’t we?”

Nancy struggled to her feet.

“Darling, what do you know?... perhaps I should explain.”

“No need. Wonder boy has been to see me already,” she said cruelly. “You should meet him, Mum, he’s a dish. You can ditch me, Little Ugly, and now claim the real thing. This is my father and I don’t suppose he’s very pleased to see what he sired all those years ago.”

This was so fast for Frank that he had difficulty keeping up with the flow of opposing emotions from the women and his own welling up inside him. But typically before he, a mere male could gather himself together, she turned and said over her shoulder: I’ll let you two get on with it I really don’t give a stuff any more it’s all your bloody mess.” He thought he sensed tears in the last few words.

“You’d better leave her,” said Nancy.

“I’d better go,” he replied.

JAMSED

Jamsed made up his mind that he would go over and see this Frank Palet and sort the thing out. He wanted to make sure Frank would pay the money for the next series of operations which would give Tracy a cosmetically pleasing left hand and a better functioning left foot. They had been told to wait until she was twenty and there was no more long bone growth. He had balked at

the price of the private surgery but now he knew he could offload most of it on to Frank he was keen to get it done.

He had been rehearsing what to say because he realised that if he lost control he would look foolish.

He went to the house and rang the door bell. A woman came to the door and, of course, he realised in his preoccupation he had forgotten to check by phone first. He had had to deal with his wife.

“Good evening,” he said “Mrs Palet? - Doctor Patel” he added by way of introduction. “I wondered if I might have a word with Mr. Palet. He was going to give me some information I need. You know, pharmaceuticals.” He lied.

“He didn't say anything” She said hesitating. “Oh, please, come in. He should be home already, anyway soon.

“Would you like a drink ? I'm afraid I've already started. Beer, gin and tonic?. Oh dear maybe you'd prefer something soft. Orange? Tea?”

“Give me tea.” He said abruptly. And then realising his rudeness, “That would be most kind. I am a Muslim, if you don't mind, we do not drink alcohol.”

“Oh we know lots of Pakistanis, you know.” she boasted. “Sorry about the gin bit. Must be ghastly not being able to unwind.” She went off to the kitchen to put the kettle on.

He thought the room was rather bland. A bit Scandinavian but he recognised the subdued good taste and quality of the furnishings. A few souvenirs and momentos gave a little character but the room was generally cold.

When she returned she had a tray with a cup of tea with a saucer and a small plate of Rich Tea biscuits.

“You must be at one of the local hospitals Doctor Patel.” ‘She's trying to be the memsahib,’ he thought. ‘She has that sort of superciliousness of the middle classes.’

He found her worse than irritating.

“Truthfully, I am a humble doctor of philosophy only” and he inwardly groaned as he recognised the intonation of the Indian babu in himself.

Unexpectedly he smiled at himself seeing how ridiculous this conversation was. But she, on the other side of the table, was busy pouring the tea and did not see his smile. She continued in the same tone.

“We visited the Khyber Pass, you know, very rugged country. They say there are bandits there raiding all the time. I think we were safe. We had the chief of police with us. They say he pays off the chiefs out of the hashish bribe money and then the tribesmen leave him alone. Is that where your people are from.”

“Actually we are Gujaratis,” he said, not really wanting to continue the conversation. He was thinking more about why he was here and what this woman was to him. She was the thief who'd

stolen his son. He did not forgive her but he remained controlled. His eyes wandered about the room. He focussed on a kukri suspended off to one side of a small bar in the corner. It was crude and he thought probably genuine rather than a tourist piece. It was very like the one he had worn as a teenage boy when he and his brothers and cousins had gone out into the bush to hunt snakes. He could not see if it had been sharpened but he remembered spending hours honing his own to a razor's edge.

She saw his look.

“Our bearer gave us that when we left. Of course I suppose we paid for it over and over again with tips and him stealing things from us but Frank likes its sort of macho appeal.”

“This insufferable woman is so typical” he thought. They always think the locals steal from them and they should have the right to ride rough shod over everything they see, buy local products cheap using their infinite buying power to force unfair bargains.

“What does Mrs. Patel do?” she asked automatically making small talk.

“We’re divorced.”

“Is she English? I mean you know, just asking. Mixed marriages must be difficult.”

“Yes,” he said.

“Mixed children have a hard time I suppose.” It sounded as if he was being chastised for the irresponsibility of bringing a child into the world.

“We have one child. She is rather blond actually.” He was trying to sound conversational but a hard edge had coloured his speech

He was sure he heard her say it under her breath ‘chee-chee’.

She had said it a little louder than she hoped. It interested her like ‘half cast’, derogatory and yet somehow defensible if true.

For Jamsed, tired and angry with himself for his poor performance with Frank the other night, this was beginning to be a very aggravating conversation.

“Luckily she’s blond, improving the blood line,” this was supposed to be a joke.

Vividly he saw before him everything he hated about white women: their false superiority, their independence, their disobedience, their voracious sexuality, and finally their manipulative dominance and crude insensitivity. He saw before him not only Sheila but Nancy and the pale face of the deformed creature, Tracy. There was a red cloud forming behind his eyes. He rose from the settee and with one swooping movement he had seized the kukri, unsheathed it and swung it towards her neck. He ignored the sound he heard behind him as Iris ran across from the bottom of the stairs

A kukri is a heavy weapon with an inward curving blade. It is a fighting knife designed for cutting on impact and as he brought it down towards her he felt the two hands tighten about his wrist. He was off balance and bent his knees to lower his centre of gravity. As he did so he brought his assailant with him. She lost her footing and crashed to the floor where she sprawled on her back. He now had a new target and he brought the weapon in an arc towards her neck as she turned away from him and it neatly incised her, cutting straight through the left jugular vein. He stopped when he saw the blood gushing like a leaking hose. But a second wave of fury surged through him and he gained enormous satisfaction as he dug the knife in deeper feeling the tissue yield until the windpipe was cut and the gasping and a gurgling sound broke his frenzy. He staggered back with the bloody knife in his hand.

Sheila was too shocked to take in what she had just seen but she knew enough to feel the danger. She did not scream as any woman in a movie might do but went into the attack, launching herself at the enraged and now compromised Patel. He freed his hands and with a balled fist landed a right jab neatly between the eyes of the flying Sheila who crumpled unconscious as she landed beside him.

He extricated himself from the fray and stared down on the scene. He needed to run. He was overcome by fear. He was a murderer in a foreign country. He left the house and wrenching the door of his car open he slammed his body behind the wheel. He sat for a moment before inserting the key. Only as he pulled away did it strike him that his intended victim was a witness to the murder. He was not aware of the irony surrounding the demise of

the actual victim who had paid dear for a small indiscretion years before.

At the end of the road he turned automatically into the traffic. He was shaking with adrenaline and had difficulty in maintaining a reasonable speed. He saw a convenience store and thought about cigarettes. That would calm him down. He had not smoked regularly for a few years. He parked the car illegally and crossed the wide pavement to the store and as calmly as possible bought a pack of Benson and Hedges. When he left the shop he could not return to the car. It would be identified by anyone who had seen him leave the house. So he turned away and walked until he came to a small park. One wall was lined with tombstones. He found a dark corner and sat on the grass. He slipped the cellophane off the packet and put a cigarette in his mouth and dug in his suit pocket. He had no matches, no lighter. He lay down on the grass and looked up at a clear starry sky. A rush of calm went through him. He realised he was going to pay for his crime. He knew he would not escape. He had no plan and the evidence was there. Whatever he did to try to escape would fail. So he would stay here, not smoking but thinking.

He thought about cars. The one he had just parked was a Mondeo. He would not drive that one again. He actually hated cars.

His embittered memory took him back to a weekend and a car. It had been in the spring of Tracy's 9th year. He had done extremely well in the financial year and after the April rush was over and had been awarded the biggest bonus ever. He had satisfied

a long held ambition by marching into the local Mercedes dealer and buying a new 500 SL. He had not spared himself any luxury. The colour was a rich metallic maroon with white leather upholstery. He had a 24 disc CD player installed and the car came with a whole host of luxurious extras. It was delivered to his house at ten o'clock on the Saturday by a showroom girl with a body to challenge the car. Although she wore business attire her suit was cut to emphasise all her physical attributes. The dealer threw in a bottle of excellent champagne. Her job was to give him an hour's "instruction" which consisted of showing him all the different combinations of CDs, tapes, radio, air-conditioning, seat movements, ventilation and heating which were possible. She demonstrated the conversion of the roof from open to closed and where the tools were in the boot and then, very expertly, took the car for a spin out to the nearby bypass where she gave him her first smile.

"There you are sir. We hope you will be very happy with this beautiful Mercedes 500SL and will allow us to take good care of it for you in the future. Do you have any more questions because if not I will leave you here to enjoy, in your own company, the pleasures of your new acquisition". As they each got out he noticed another Mercedes pull up behind and she walked to it giving him a second parting smile and a wave.

"Danke, Frauline" he almost said. The little speech must have been written by a German, 'such efficiency' he thought and the second smile, was it in the script?

The wet grass interrupted his reverie as he could feel the cold passing through his suit but he sat up staring in the

direction of the gate at the other end of the small park and masochistically remembered the rest of that poignant weekend.

He had driven about a hundred miles in the end. He had headed South West on that most glorious May day and finished up near Basingstoke in the rolling hills. He had left the motorway and meandered through lanes and byways. Returning as it was beginning to get dark he had driven into his garage and closed the up and over door automatically. He had turned the key just one click to the left leaving the c.d. playing Verdi's Requiem, one of the complimentary package. He was surrounded by sound and the sheer luxury of this immensely special car. As he pressed the button to recline the seat he became aware of his very stiff erection. He had noticed it earlier but it had been easy to ignore as he sped through the countryside and wound his way effortlessly through the suburbs. He was in love with his car. With his right hand he caressed himself gently and opened his fly and before long his excitement rose and he ejaculate messily over the front of his suit. Then he burst out laughing at himself. He felt like the boy again, hiding in the trees and secretly playing with himself. He smiled and laughed with a strange release of tension. For a split second he had felt happy.

He had taken a beautiful yellow duster, adorned with the Mercedes emblem and tried to wipe up the mess and then went inside, where he began to feel ashamed of himself. Seeing the drinks cabinet and a bottle of Chivas Regal he'd poured himself a very large scotch and sat on the sofa. There was news on the T.V. and he had watched with only slight attention. When his glass was empty he remembered the bottle of champagne in the car and went out for it, finishing it slowly as he watched a series of inane chat programmes,

games shows and movies until he snored. At three he woke up staggered, via the bathroom to his bedroom and dropping his clothes in a heap on the floor fell on the bed, fought with the duvet for a little while, and slept till sunshine streaming in the window woke him at eight.

It had been his turn to take Tracy out for the day. He had been looking forward to showing her the new car and getting her reaction to the speed and luxury. He was going to treat her like a princess. He put last night out of his mind, and he felt no ill effects from the whisky the superb champagne.

He arrived exactly on time and his daughter was all ready in her going-out uniform.

“Daddy, Daddy, what a nice car. Did you buy it?”

“Yes, my darling, especially for you.”

“Johnny’s Daddy’s got a Ford Sierra. Johnny says they’re the best cars out. Is this a Ford Sierra?”

“Who’s Johnny?”

“Oh he’s just a boy.”

“This car is much better than a Ford. Look it has automatic gears. Would you like some music?”

“Johnny’s almost in the first eleven. He got fifteen runs yesterday afternoon.”

“What sort of music would you like?” he put on a Lulu c.d.

“Johnny likes New Rock. His Daddy gave him an iPod.”

The afternoon had continued in this vein until Jamsed had been told everything about Johnny and Johnny's Daddy and Tracy had shown absolute indifference towards the white hide upholstery, the CD player, power steering and even the automatic drophead. She had smeared chocolate ice-cream over the white carpet and made the front seat sticky. When he had taken her back to school she had kissed him perfunctorily and rushed off, probably to find Johnny.

Tears in his eyes he remembered the rest of that bad day.

Arriving back at the garage he misjudged the length of the new car and rammed it into Tracy's bike at the end wall, smashing the plastic number plate with a loud crack and misshaping the bumper. He rammed the gear lever to reverse and, just too late, remembered that he had already pressed the automatic garage door 'close' button. Reversing too far he heard the door land on the boot lid. Not stopping to think he put the lever to forward again effecting a long scratch down the lid as the car leapt forward and this time crunched firmly into the bike bending it and driving a pedal through the radiator grill. By coincidence Verdi's Requiem was playing again and he remembered, miserably, last night's episode.

He had gone into a deep depression. He had left the keys in the ignition and entered the house where he had found the salesman's card and telephoned his private number.

“It's not for me. I just do not want it back. Just take it out of the garage. Mrs. Smith will let you into the garage and the keys will be in the car.”

He had reckoned the loss to be around seven thousand pounds and he soon hated the Ford Sierra he had bought in its place.

He saw a young couple had entered the park at the other end so he lay back down again and stared at the stars.

THE COUPLE.

Jerry wanted so much to see her again but he was unsure. She had seemed so definite and angry when they had last parted that he was afraid that he was not wanted. He knew she had no phone, so the only thing he could do was to go up to her digs in the hope she was there. He drove fast but well. He parked around the corner and walked up to her rooms. The building was much dirtier looking in the daylight and he had had a bit of a problem with security, but they took his student's union card and let him in. He leapt up the stairs fast and arrived at her door. He knocked. There was no answer and automatically he tried the handle the door gave

in immediately and he took a step inside and called: "Tracy, it's Jerry. Look, can I come in?" There was no reply but he did not stop.

The place was untidy. The first thing he noticed was a heap of half rolled drawing paper on the floor, an assortment of pencils, crayons, a coffee mug a three glasses and an empty Vodka bottle, ashtrays, wrappers and other debris and behind that in the corner a single bed half covered with a crumpled duvet beneath which were assorted knickers and bras and a pair of jeans in that just-stepped-out-of attitude only girls' jeans can assume. He was drawn in. This was her persona. He was in her domain and he was now fascinated. There was an A2 portfolio leaning against the window wall. He waded through the mess and opened it. There were sketches. Almost all of them depicted the human body but especially there was a series of hands, beautiful hands, long slender fingers holding things, pushing pulling, entwining, clawing, waving, squeezing, pointing and caressing. And as he turned he came upon feet again in all poses and shapes and sizes some very beautiful and some gnarled and callused but all complete and strong. And then he looked up and there was a life sized mural of Christ on the cross. His face was swarthy and his hair was black and wavy. He was Levantine. Then he noticed the blood running from the right hand where the nail had cruelly pierced his palm but his left wrist was tied with rough rope and the hand was stunted like a deformed artichoke and his left foot looked the same as it dangled loosely while the right foot bled profusely at the entry of the spike. He wanted to stay but he felt that he should not. He was stripping her bare by invading her privacy. He felt guilt. He took a piece of paper and wrote a short note with his address back at the Uni. Maybe she would come in the

meantime he would go over to look for her at the studio. She wasn't there so he drove home.

It had taken her a day to realise that Jerry must have seen quite a lot of her stuff. She was a bit shy now and she began to see her work through the eyes of another. It was too revealing for comfort. She felt slightly defiled but at the same time she a great surge of warmth for Jerry. She needed to see him. She lingered for the rest of the afternoon until around five she decided to go over.

It had been a warm day and Jerry had been playing cricket. He was in the shower in his digs. Tracy had made her way over and found his room easily. When she pushed gently on the door she was greeted by the steamy odour of a sporting youth, a combination of sweet and sour sweat, slightly cheesy socks and earth. There was a strong perfume from the soap mingling with the steam. She stood for a moment taking in the scene: white cricket gear on the floor, a towel near the shower but the rest of the room generally tidy and neat. She closed the door and, seeing the key, locked it. She now was driven by some irresistible force. She shed her clothes in what seemed to be a single movement and then standing there totally vulnerable she approached the plastic door of the shower cubicle.

Jerry was luxuriating. He missed his bath at home, but one of the good things about these digs was the unlimited hot water. He was surprised as the door opened and even more surprised when he saw the transparent white skin of the naked girl standing there. As she opened the door she was seized with a panic. She saw his beautifully muscled body running with steaming water before her.

As he turned she felt like running but was riveted to the spot. He wiped the water out of his eyes and then seeing who the wide open blue eyes belonged to, he reached out his arms. Her hands came up involuntarily to cover her naked breasts, but his strong hands took her wrists and pulled her in beside him and as he enfolded her in his arms the hot water poured over her head. She relaxed completely as blond hair was soaked hanging down in long, wet tresses. He held her very tight as new emotions swept through him.

Nothing was said. They soaped each other and caressed their bodies and smiled and kissed and then without a word they left the shower hardly bothering to dry themselves climbed all over each other on the bed and made love.

Tracy had felt no pain as Jerry had quite gently entered her and they had slowly raised each other's consciousness to new heights. They kept no account of the climaxes but the lusty couple did not sleep until around five in the morning.

Hunger had got the better of them. They fried two eggs and sitting naked at the cheap Formica table ate them off a shared plate. They then surveyed the fridge's mean offerings of milk, rather stale bread and some pate. He spotted a packet of cornflakes on the floor and poured a bowl. She moved on to his knee and they shared these too. He dipped his finger in the sugar and dabbed little white snowcaps on her nipples.

“Stop it, silly,” she said.

“I'm going to lick it off and send you into ecstasy,” he said grinning wickedly.

THE SECOND OFFICERS'S WIFE AND OTHER STORIES

“Oh no you're not.”

“If not little red ants will come and eat the sugar and tickle you and tickle you until you scream.”

And they kissed again deep and long, the sugar tumbled down the front of his naked body and she licked it off him.

After another day and a lot of loving later they consciously emerged into the world. As darkness fell, hunger pangs got more powerful again so they dressed and walked stiffly to Pizza Hut. They took their cardboard tray out and round to the small park nearby and sat on a park bench and ate in silence.

Suddenly their peace was broken. Six policemen carrying long truncheons came in at the other end of the park shone their torches in all directions and left frogmarching a rather short Indian man away with them. Tracy felt a flutter pass over her heart but she looked away directly into Jerry's eyes and took courage from his strong and confident look.

“Why don't they leave that poor fellow alone? He's only sleeping on the grass,” he said before she covered his mouth with hers.

END

THE SECOND OFFICERS'S WIFE AND OTHER STORIES

EAST END REUNION

There were cliques forming; new arrivals looking for familiar faces. I looked around to see where I would fit in. A gang of muscular and tattooed tradesmen in loud plaid cheque or polo shirts, whose Transits and Sprinter vans occupied most of the playground were up the far end of the 'small' assembly hall, retelling old pranks played on the long suffering staff, talking up the cruelty they had inflicted on the ragged juniors or the pale skinny waiflike girls and the mischief they had or nearly had: loud with their over-accentuated beery broad cockney.

On the other side stood a quiet group Asians, posing prosperously with their bright monochrome shirts ostentatiously open-necked, showing gold against narrow, hirsute chests. They giggled boldly at in-jokes, secure in their tight community and employment in their uncle's or cousin's import-export or restaurant businesses.

In scruffy jeans and slogan tee shirts were the apparently less-employed; consumers or makers of electronic computer games. Spotty, anorexic or obese they were fidgeting, not communicating but associating by a sort of herd proximity.

A gaggle of young women, equally unhealthy looking, were in another corner, passing round bottles of

Smirnoff-and-tonic. They were bursting into shrieks of coarse laughter every now and again at jokes, no doubt at the expense of all males; a small clique, all other females wisely staying away.

Confident and well dressed in designer jeans, many-pocketed shirts or cashmere v-necks against their tanned white skins, were five tall, handsome guys. I fancied this was my metier. I recognised some of them and made my way in their direction. I had taken care to park away from the dilapidated Fords, superannuated Volvos and shiny vans noting that there was another Porsche 911 there already. But away from the line around the edge, carelessly and arrogantly placed right in the middle of the playground was a Ferrari 458 Spider. A deep irritation had seized me when I drove round it, and the matter of who owned it preoccupied my thoughts as I approached the group.

Before I had a chance to greet my fellows a silence descended on the room. It started with the semi inebriated women and spread. Heads turned towards the entrance. Was this Lutricia Boko, statuesque, dressed from Harrods? And on her arm, for she was not on the arm of her diminutive squirty escort, was "Titch" Grady in a silk suit and pink shirt, pointy patent-leather shoes, his shiny balding head just reaching the height of her magnificent dark brown cleavage not quite hidden by her beautifully tailored crimson jacket.

When the new arrivals were in the middle of the room they stopped to get maximum effect from his opening

remark: "I 'ope none of you pricks has scratched my bright red beast, and it *is* a beast, I'm tellin' ya."

He laughed; a kind of nasty bitter laugh while Lutricia stood there, all of her slim, elegant six foot beauty, with a half smile set as rigidly as Mona Lisa's. The tension in the room expressed silently the gross resentment going through the minds of those present. The women in their Primark tee-shirts and cheap baggy jeans were scowling like cats facing off a scruffy, scarred alley-cat, remembering the domineering physicality of the ex-child-beast now posing before them like a supermodel. The tradesmen showed signs of pent up aggression, the nerds looked bored and the men in my group looked astounded and puzzled but not amused. The smart import-export and curry-house men looked admiringly at the couple and were preparing to befriend these wonderful people who had obviously found the holy grail of "success".

It may have been a cruel coincidence or a piece of luck that the Porsche 911 of which I had been so proud was to be returned the next morning after the second month of a three year lease-buy agreement. It had been a deal designed to take advantage of a tax-break: ha, ha there would be no tax to pay this year. I was properly broke and bankrupt. My business partner, Stan and I had been through the whole cycle of genius, design, development, marketing with all the razzle-dazzle of champagne-caviar parties, beta version roll-out and massive projected earnings. Our matching Porsches had seemed to be a modest perk and then suddenly, out of the blue, had come the hammer blow. Just as we were flying high with one of the largest venture

capitalists in the dot com business he dropped us in favour of a completely unknown competitor from Belgium working on the same universally appealing application backed by Swiss money heading up the investment syndicate.

I could see us now as we sat in our new flashy and expensive office in The Science and Technology Park, Oxford staring at each other in disbelief. Our leading V.C. had jumped ship to join another syndicate informing us on our own nascent app. in a curt message entitled: "My lucky day, sorry about you."

My partner, the genius who had developed all the algorithms and with whom I had spent a year bouncing the ideas around, was convinced the Belgian had stolen the system from him. He went on a massive drunk and was presently away, accommodated at Her Majesty's pleasure for running over and injuring a child while "under the influence" (a rank understatement) of alcohol and other substances.

So here I was pretending things were still OK but the real question was; "Why am I here?"

I told myself there would be an opportunity for the famous "networking" but the truth was I had responded to the invitation because I had nowhere else to go. My best female friend and lover had been "let go" from her programming job, and was no longer interested in a loser like me; perhaps she had crossed the sea to Belgium.

I noticed the Asians were gradually moving, as a straggling mob, and gathering loosely around the star couple

wondering what had led to their ascendancy. I was pretty sure I knew it was something he had learnt from his auntie. I had been round to her house once to deliver a small packet of money for my dad. Looking back I realise Dad sent me out of shame, not wanting to be seen at the door of the lady who was known as the “cash witch”. The ancient aunt had given me a chocolate biscuit from a jar she kept near the front door. In the back of the hall I had spotted Titch smiling a rather evil grin. I started to open my mouth to greet him when the door was shut gently in my face. I had hesitated on the step relishing the delicious sweetness of the chocolate and crumble texture of the enveloped biscuit and pondering over the scene.

After all this time I was able to come to the conclusion that he must have been behind the first of the well-advertised and publicised local pay-day lenders. “Banka” was the name they used and their slogan was half of the well known adage, “A stitch in time...” and “Banka: your financial anchor” both of which sounded like cynically cruel jokes to those now in the clutches of the successors to the wicked witch. The rumour was that they had they sold their patch to Wonga.

I was not going to fight through throng of fans fawning to the great couple.

We soon knew who had called this highly unexpected meeting. A surprisingly loud booming voice emanated from the now large group in the middle of the hall. Titch:

“I invited you all ‘ere because I want to fink of my old playmates as my friends. I remember the good old days, carefree in the playground for you but I was the ginger, short-arse kid, excluded, ridiculed, beaten and blamed, but what you bastards did not notice was how I was not crying and wimping, not cowarded. Oh no, I was resentful, angry and scheming. ‘When I am bigger,’ I kept telling myself, ‘I will get these shits and squeeze the juice out of ’em.’ Well I ditn’t get much bigger, but look at me now. Who else has made a million? Who else ‘as a red Spider? Who got the classiest bitch on his arm? Eh?

“In vese ‘ard times I know some of you might need an ‘elpin’ ‘and to tide you over. Vat’s me now: Mr. Nice.”

Suddenly he emerged from the crowd in my direction. “I remember you and I know you betta ‘n you might fink. You’re in deep shit. I go fru court records in the Law Gazette looking for bankrup’s an’ such; but I can ‘elp you.” The crowd parted as he advanced on me with his hand outstretched to shake mine. I was nearer the door. I turned and ran out to the car. I sat in the seat and for the first time in my life I knew exactly what a day time ‘nightmare’ would feel like.

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